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**THE TRUTH ABOUT LITERATURE: AN EXAMINATION OF EMOTION AND
ETHICS ACROSS GENRE**

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

In
English
by

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Approved by

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Marshall University
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ABSTRACT

The following thesis presents strategies for reading ethically across a series of texts while discussing the emotional labor writers endure throughout their writing processes. By examining the current pedagogical approaches in composition studies, readers of writing can interpret the use of emotion in texts as a rhetorical strategy, while also recognizing instances of its social construction beyond the classroom. Once providing evidence for how writers execute emotion in their work, the thesis continues by discussing how J. Hillis Miller's theory of ethics is applied to the narrative structure of stories and texts, and how readers can recognize the emotional strategies demonstrated by writers. Finally, after reviewing texts that explore different genres of stories including fiction, fiction based on true events, and nonfiction, the thesis concludes by assessing how effective Suzanne Keen's theory of narrative empathy is in all three texts. The thesis seeks to scaffold how writers and readers can become mindful toward approaching texts and writing while simultaneously acknowledging how both parties work in tandem to create a combined and individualistic experience for every reader.

INTRODUCTION

Writing can serve multiple purposes. Whether seeking to polish a resume for professional writing, adequately articulating sources in an academic paper, or even writing about personal experience, writing is an inclusive practice. While writing about one's life and memories, a myriad of emotions have the opportunity to surface, either from the memory itself or within the process of writing. Whatever the outcome, having to then share one's writing or even read the writing of a peer also elicits an emotional response. These responses make students reflect on themselves in comparison, leaving themselves at the mercy of their emotions attempting to make connections. Scholar Benjamin Hagen wrote an article about his own personal experience with reading and eliciting specific emotional responses while reading the unfinished memoir of Virginia Woolf. Hagen introduces his article by defining Woolf's writing as a mark of "sensuous pedagogy" (267). Hagen explains that Woolf is able to understand the nonlinearity of feelings and emotions tied to chronological events in one's life, while also considering how her writing seeks to teach potential readers about themselves and their own lives (266). Hagen emphasizes that to process ourselves emotionally requires many avenues that we may find helpful, as he does with Woolf's writing, even when he rereads her work and tends to be "caught off guard," either on a jog or talking with his students, and consistently repositions his identity as an academic, writer, student, and human being (270). Finding a way to process our own emotions through reading—or in Hagen's case also rereading—means observing the text at hand is of equal importance. As Hagen explains Woolf's description of "moments of being," these moments of clarity are ones that stay with Woolf throughout her life. Woolf's reasoning skills mature as she does, which allows her to access these "moments of being" more easily over time (270). Woolf also makes a distinction in what are "moments of nonbeing" that are more procedural, like

performing household chores, although other formulaic actions like writing and reading were beneficial toward honing in on skills particular to reasoning. When Woolf remembers her past, oftentimes in her childhood, she remembers specific moments of “shock” in which she feels overstimulated, with memories like fights within the family or news about someone’s suicide (Hagen 270).

Investigating if this moment of “shock” is a response to an overstimulation of emotion and if Woolf’s body creates these moments of “being” versus “nonbeing” as a means of coping with experience, especially when reassessing these categories of emotion when writing about oneself, is interesting. Although the personal essay does work in some way to compartmentalize experience through organization with how the essay is written, perhaps with paragraphs leading to other points of interest, the essay never diminishes the opportunity for the sporadic nature of emotion to affect the writer in unpredictable ways. Such unpredictable displays of emotion in students’ writing can be cited by instructor Sara DeBacher and her assignment on the personal essay after the events of Hurricane Katrina. DeBacher’s students showed resistance when asked to revise their personal essays as a part of the writing process. Because their emotions were strongly tied to their writing due to their attachment with Katrina, they felt being asked to revise was an attempt at dismissing their feelings (DeBacher and Harris-Moore). Although the framework and intent behind assignments like the personal essay are still applicable in classes today, the emotional states of the students in these classes are always changing.

Similarly, instructors must always be present to adapt to the emotions being presented to them, much like how Hagen finds himself always reshaping his assessments of Woolf’s work. Therefore, seeing emotion as an ever-changing and evolving concept requires the perimeters of what we already know about how to handle emotion in writing to always seek expansion. For

example, by framing trauma into a “triumph narrative” in memoir by emphasizing hope as a recurring theme, also creates a standard for potentially darker elements of memoir to not be given limelight within the genre (Conway 10). Emotions then become constructed to a certain degree of what is considered admissible and inadmissible instead of being examined intensively and without accidentally creating these consequences of displaying emotion. Beyond considering the strategies for utilizing emotion through assignments, as DeBacher does, we must also consider how we already define emotion and how we retain emotion.

Emotions are not bound just to writing, of course. Emotions are present in everything we do in life and are collectively and culturally constructed. The list of emotions itself can be considered infinite. In order to give emotions a tighter scope, I seek to consider what “strong emotions” can potentially appear in writing in the classroom and/or assigned texts. Such emotions could be levels of anger or sadness, which I have chosen to specifically examine as trauma. Marian MacCurdy, similar to DeBacher, is an instructor concerned with how to contain experiences, including trauma. By focusing on descriptors and setting, hopefully not letting students get too absorbed by their own experiences, MacCurdy still accommodates the integrity of the experience, as DeBacher’s students sought for. However, emotions themselves become tricky to define. Laura Micciche, a scholar of composition and pedagogy, considers how we must tread lightly when we detect emotion, specifically if emotion is unconscious or conscious. In response to her composition students claiming that emotions are instinctive and analysis is a product of acquired learning skills in the classroom, Micciche explains that, “no pure, unconstructed representation of emotion or reason is possible” (“Doing Emotion” 67). Micciche argues that what we consider instinctive emotion is actually just as artificial as reasoning behind analysis because we are always culturally configuring how emotions work in appropriate

contexts (“Doing Emotion” 67). Because we have so many vehicles in determining what emotions mean as we grow up, whether from our families or a TV screen, it is easy to have these somewhat automatic responses in what to do when approached with strong emotions like trauma. One such response could be empathy. Which, although well-intended, empathy does not necessarily have any opposing emotional response. We empathize as a conditioned response and accidentally keep ourselves from critical self-reflection in the process (Craps and Buelens 5). We appreciate when people can produce an empathetic response, because we already believe that person must have to make that choice to empathize with another person. However, there is no visible link that empathy is an emotion we choose to initiate or if emotion is something we dramatize.

We are never formally taught how to empathize with others, but we are often presented with texts throughout our schooling that require reflective inquiry to ourselves, allowing us to interpret messages and themes in stories. Repetitively reading texts, communicating ideas, and seeing how narrative is shaped can indicate how we process and retain emotions. Thus, reading—as a decisive and conscious act—might be a solution to not only gain skills in empathetic capacity, but can also extend in helping students become better writers and garner emotional agency. Scholar Suzanne Keen researched how reading fictional texts is an effective practice in flexing our emotional capacities. Keen cites that fiction is resourceful for study because fiction demonstrates that as readers, conscious that we know what is being presented to us cannot bring us realistic aid in our own situations, we still choose to become attached to characters and narrative strategies that leave us more flexible to leave our emotions accessible. Using the realm of fiction to demonstrate our emotional responses gives us the most liberty to process our personal ideas towards the text, unlike nonfiction texts. Analyzing nonfiction texts

could stifle a reader's empathetic response, knowing the content of the text is presented as true (220). Keen emphasizes that this process of analyzing texts is not one-size-fits-all but is a nuanced combination of demonstrating thinking and feeling and that reading is equally a cognitive and emotional process (213). Attempting to compartmentalize how a reader can indicate these different reading experiences, Keen references three instances of empathetic response: "situational empathy," (215) "empathetic inaccuracy," (215) and establishing strategies of narrative (218). However, despite Keen's thoroughness in these measures for reading texts, she still admits that reading has yet to have correlation to the reader's prosocial behavior, assuming the reader has achieved an empathetic response to the text (213). Maybe this analysis for prosocial behavior is missing because of Keen's lack of research on a few considerations:

- What is there to be learned when analyzing nonfiction texts through the strategies Keen mentions, like situational empathy and empathetic inaccuracy?
- How does Micciche's theory of emotion work with Keen's theory of narrative empathy when considering emotions like trauma as a trigger for empathetic response?
- How can prosocial behavior perhaps be gauged when considering respondents of reading texts, like students and instructors?

Prosocial behavior, for example, might be hard to understand as a sole response to DeBacher and her students with the assigned personal essay. Although students might elicit prosocial behavior in the aftermath of Katrina, the emotional response becomes tricky to indicate because of the attachment students have to their own experiences. Therefore, could other pedagogical approaches instill prosocial behavior without the intimacy of the personal essay?

Keen also does not mention another critical factor to reading texts: ethics. Scholar J. Hillis Miller studied how ethics is relevant to any reading experience. By perceiving the "law" of the

text itself—meaning to examine literature in a deconstructive lens and how the writer and reader creates these laws (*Ethics* 10)—the reader can question everything being presented to him correlating as truth. Creating this framework identifies how to be able to confront emotion in texts by first assessing what emotional intent exists in the writing and then assessing how the reader perceives and retains the emotional response. I argue that by employing Miller’s ideas towards ethics in a framework of reading through a series of texts across genre, we can find how to gauge empathetic responses more effectively. By considering the narrative strategies regarding empathy that Keen describes, reading three types of text across genre in a specific sequence can provide insight for how emotion is working in each one for the reader and writer. The first text is a fictitious text, the second text is what I call a “partial fiction” text (a fictitious text including true events), and the last text is a nonfiction text. Furthermore, discussing nonfiction text last as the culmination of demonstrating skills in how to read ethically is to offer an alternative to Keen’s argument about nonfiction texts hindering the reader’s chance at empathetic response. I hope to find that the answers to these questions are actually much deeper and do not resolve in singular solutions, as doing so would go against Hagen’s analysis of Woolf’s nonlinearity of emotion (266). Therefore, my research would require going beyond just composition and pedagogy, thus taking an interdisciplinary approach and getting insight from outside texts and resources. For example, considering other inquiries—like how to establish truth in nonfiction texts—requires insight from texts pertaining to St. Augustine and the difference between confession and truth (Caputo and Scanlon). By deconstructing language to reinterpret how ethics is working in texts to see how emotion is working consciously, as Micciche believes, we can benefit by sharpening our reading skills to be able to pinpoint when we consciously elicit empathetic responses to determine prosocial behavior and instances of sensuous pedagogy.

Compartmentalizing how ethics and emotion are working altogether requires intensive context for how they affect the writer and reader individually, and then finally, how they work in tandem across genre analysis. Sequencing information regarding the writer, reader, and both working together, evolves to a point where all three are weaving in and out of each other to create context for examining their nuanced relationships with empathy.

The Writer

To write is to think, to reflect, to relearn, and to be alone. Writing simultaneously leaves the writer in a space of community and isolation. Students may begin writing a response to a prompt on the board, the same prompt as their peers, often in silence. A student may begin to look over one's shoulder, crane his arm over his paper, more conscious now of how his peers are also writing. A medley of concerns take laps around his thoughts, now substituting the prompt on the board. Has he written too little? Too much? Is it wrong or right? Perhaps then, the student resigns himself, setting his pencil down and waits for the instructor to ask if anyone would like to share. He lets his classmates' voices fill the room as they mindlessly nod in agreement to show a sign of receptiveness. When a student begins writing outside of the classroom, people can be quick to label him as a writer, a term potentially meaning someone that hopes to publish his own writing. Already, expectations are made for any instance in which one writes, whether in the classroom or in society. Although these external concerns exist, writing is an intimate experience requiring conscious thought towards what is being written, and why.

Composition classrooms can be a hub for assignments seeking to answer how students can assess their experiences and respond to "why." However, the outcomes of these assignments are what need direction, or containment, regarding how writers attempt to compartmentalize their experiences in an assignment. Assignments like personal essay can allow students to conceive

the idea that the more emotion that is displayed in writing, the more genuine the writing seems. High emotion coupled with being genuine is not a bad assumption in writing; what is difficult, however, is students understanding how to assess their emotions in a sequence, as opposed to being spilled all over the page. Moreover, the question remains: what emotions are “allowed” in assignments like the personal essay? A question like this nods back to Sara DeBacher and her assignment regarding personal experience, assigned after the events of Hurricane Katrina. Once students were later asked to consider aspects of revision towards their personal experiences in the face of Katrina, she was met with quick criticism from her students, citing that the proposition of revision assumes that the emotion of the experience no longer exists. The students’ reaction creates a paradigm for how writing is being used consciously, assuming on one hand that experience could be gauged to a grade, and that clearer parameters needed to be set for students to recall their experiences as a writing strategy versus opportunity for offense (Debacher & Harris-Moore). Writing with affect and writing academically do not seem to be able to exist simultaneously. Trying to identify if the students consciously made this decision for choosing how to write, either while actually writing the paper or if only realized when approached with criticism, is questionable. Furthermore, understanding DeBacher’s surprise at her students’ reactions to revision is to wonder how writing is constructed across generations, and what writing’s purpose is, if having a singular one. Although, knowing Marian MacCurdy hosted a personal essay class for first-year writers that illuminated the behavior and patterns featured in their writing, assumes that the idea of a generational gap about how writing is constructed is an isolated incident on Debacher’s experience, as MacCurdy’s experience with teaching writing was well-received. However, MacCurdy implemented what she described as a “visualization process” for writers to grasp their experiences more closely and objectively (179). Proving effective,

MacCurdy found that strictly honing on experience and memory on the basis of setting vs. uncontained emotion still gave the writer enough freedom to feel comfortable confronting potentially unsettling emotions by compartmentalizing them by articulating descriptive setting (179). Having this specific tactic in writing can be symbolic of the nature of emotion being used in writing as conscious or unconscious, placing DeBacher in the latter and MacCurdy in the former. Even so, acknowledging that composition classrooms offer an acceptable space for coming into terms with experience and emotion interrogates how emotion is perceived in the first place. Laura Micciche believes that atop of students recognizing the need to assess how emotion is working in their own writing, they must also consider how emotion is used by their peers. Even beyond studying writing peer to peer, composition instructors must also become conscious of their influence over the classroom. Acknowledging this dynamic, Micciche believes, helps dissipate the effects of emotion as an unconscious, unchallenged association to specific experiences and instead emphasizes how emotion remains unbiased, waiting to latch onto a signifier (55). Micciche offers a concept known as “deep embodiment pedagogy” to culminate the resourcefulness of knowing how to handle emotion in the classroom by having students begin to stray from thinking about the self, to finding more satisfaction by becoming attentive to how peers articulate their experiences—and thus emotions—in a methodological way (60).

The Reader

Thinking again towards the type of content, or emotion, that students appear to produce, I wanted to consider aspects of trauma, such as the case with DeBacher and her students. Here, perhaps, is the best space for conversation concerning the effectiveness of allowing the composition classroom as a community for healing through writing. Instructors, or in this lens the “reader,” can instill their own pedagogical interests that they believe can enhance the

learning experience, but must determine if the benefit is a possibility for everyone involved. Benjamin Batzer and Eric Leake, both teachers who believe in the power of empathy used as a strategy in the classroom, also become vulnerable to the consequences of attempting to allow one specific emotion in the classroom. Trauma, then, is used to gauge empathetic response. The possibility for retraumatization upon a student writing about oneself is possible and may overshadow the well-intended empathetic result (Leake and Batzer). However, what do the intentions of teachers like Batzer and Leake imply? Do they accidentally signal to the student that trauma is capable of compartmentalization, thus never to be reassessed again in one's life? Rachel Spears believed that using emotion, especially trauma in this way, instills an opportunity for "wounded healer pedagogy" to take effect. Spears considered one's trauma as a powerful tool, an experience capable of being reshaped through writing, instead of dismissed (68), or in this case for Batzer and Leake, written away to spotlight empathy. Instructors play an important role as professionals and witnesses to trauma in writing. Therefore, having the instructor establish a classroom community—such as through assignments—is integral to how a student could progress with evolving his or her own traumas through writing. Speculating that any sense of unbiased emotion is possible in the classroom, as well as in writing, becomes minimal, and just might well be. The likeliness of understanding how to gauge the exchange between students to peers, or students to instructors, determines evidence towards what emotions are at play and what they do to each respective party. But by examining resources, such as first beginning to research how trauma is processed through writing and learning how to read ethically, examining them can diminish any unconscious effects of emotion when used in writing and can hopefully have the writer and reader more aware of its performative value.

Everyone has a different, socially constructed idea of how they define what trauma is, among other emotions. Keeping in mind Micciche's belief in emotion as performative must also mean to become objective to personal experience concerning trauma. If one were to believe that empathy is the answer, such as Batzer and Leake do, where does that leave the writer? Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth believes that empathy actually keeps the reader from becoming more critically self-aware of where that empathy is coming from (Craps & Buelens 5). There is the possibility that the empathy is a result of the reader relating to the writer, but alternatively could also mean that by relating to the experience, the reader becomes fixated on the projection of his own experience, instead of assessing the writer's experience as initially intended. Empathy is an acceptable response as empathy makes the reader feel comfortable and the writer feels potentially validated by sharing his or her writing. Yet nothing becomes learned. Both reader and writer submit to their emotions, leaving Micciche's claims towards emotion as performance up for speculation and intrigue again. If Spears believes that reshaping trauma is also to empower oneself, then the reconstruction taking place is still in need of investigation for how trauma is socially constructed. Other trauma theorists, like Kali Tal, consider three possibilities alone for how trauma becomes perceived as a social construct: trauma as myth, trauma as medical, and trauma as disappearance (Geddes 12). These options, whether conscious or not by the writer, consider how trauma can be reshaped as non-frightening, curable, or molded as nonexistent entirely. Given these possibilities to remedy trauma also reinforces how society consistently attempts to define emotion, but at the same time, supports Micciche's view of how to channel emotion subjectively.

Using Miller's ideas of ethics considers the multiple possibilities of the relationships that occur between writers and readers, and how emotion becomes shaped by the writer and reader,

but also what happens when they both shape a new experience together. To perceive Micciche's approach to emotion through language as deconstruction, Miller believes that this simplification of language leaves room for ethics and the "law" of literature (*Ethics* 10). He believes that there is a specific moment where a reader and writer, working in tandem with the presented characters and narrator in the text itself, reach a conclusion in forming what the experience entails and means (*Ethics* 8). How Spears believes in reconstructing trauma also leaves speculation to assess what exists as the truth when assessing a writer's experiences atop of the emotions based on those experiences. Not believing what a writer describes as a traumatic experience sounds unheard of and offensive, but those feelings that surface, perhaps, are evidence again of treating emotion as unconscious. If trauma can be reconstructed, so can truth, including memories. Leaving room to exercise new truths in our memories, believing doing so could help us overcome traumatic events if using writing to heal, is a plausible resolution.

A New Experience

Concerning trauma again, considering what psychologically occurs within the mind of someone living with traumatic memories and experiences is important. Joshua Pederson believes that trauma victims already become susceptible in validating their own memories as truth, as trauma has the potential to distort time and therefore cause specific coping mechanisms in order to confront the trauma, thus becoming inaccessible (Pederson 339). Known as "traumatic amnesia," theorists are afraid that if a traumatic memory remains unassessed to the victim, they actually lose agency over the memory. Theorists believe that not having agency over the traumatic memory could leave the victim vulnerable to retraumatization (Pederson 338). Because trauma then remains unclaimed or lacks a signifier, Cathy Caruth believes that by implementing nonverbal communication with the trauma, such as through writing, simultaneously keeps the

writer safe by compartmentalizing the experience in writing and reconstructing the trauma at the writer's convenience (Pederson 337). But what happens when texts that are personal and marketed as truth end up being presented as reconstructed truth? Benjamin Wilkomirski's memoir *Fragments*, which describes his experiences as a child during the Holocaust, was met with backlash when discovered that some details of the memoir were revealed as falsified information (67). How texts are deemed as a memoir, focusing on how narrative structure is just as important as the truth of the experience itself, becomes questionable (71). A reader's goal is to experience replication of the experience through storytelling, not the actual experience itself. Without reading ethically, readers let their betrayal of what is considered truth to hinder the benefit of accomplishing empathy through an experience they themselves have not personally endured. Traumatic experiences become detached from the writer when examined, as the assessment of the trauma in itself becomes a prioritized new experience. Perhaps writing this book was Wilkomirski's way of assessing himself, but he unfortunately disregarded readers' input in crafting the new experience as well. Assessing a text requires being conscious of how the reader and writer interpret language itself. Therefore, for readers, perhaps a sequenced approach of specific texts across genres can help them learn how to be ethical readers effectively and not let their emotions supersede objective observation. J.L. Austin described this process as looking for "literal meaning," which means reinforcing that language belongs to no one, and that to understand truth is to absolve the existence of a binary between what is true and what is false. Because anyone can construct language to meaning, truth matters more as truth exists in statements, not in sentences (Hansen 620).

If truly understanding concepts like truth and ethics means simplifying language in a lawless space, then there is room for examination of other lawless concepts like time. Assessing

ethical responsibility and determining what is true vs. untrue creates another binary by determining who controls time. St. Augustine was curious of time, assuming that any indication of time, if governed by anyone, was done so by God (Rahman 27). If time belonged to everyone, then eternity must only be a privilege of God, leaving time left to human experience because time reflects mortality. Augustine, becoming insecure of his interest in the difference between time and eternity, quickly dismissed his intrigue and replaced it with ignorance. In doing so, he felt this kept himself safe, no longer feeling he was defying God's gift of time, but his choice of ignorance also kept him away from seeking truth (Rahman 28). Choosing ignorance, although demonstrating a conscious decision, argues that Augustine's defiance against God unsettling him was unconscious. Believing God governs time, Augustine manipulates time by choosing to confess to God of his sin for wondering about eternity, offering him a clean slate to reset his free will (Rahman 31).

Our shortcoming is not our capacity or recognition for opportunities to think ethically, but that, in this case, thinking beyond unconscious emotional response is wrong, and that by adhering to the social constructs of how to believe in situations, we accept the "laws" of language and interpret truth as an individual experience, instead of a shared one. Augustine's act of confession relates back to how beneficial seeking empathetic response is in the classroom when confronted with writing that is potentially traumatic. Derrida believes that although Augustine did confess, God would not see his act any differently than not confessing (Caputo and Scanlon 9). If God is law, then Augustine sought confession for his own intent, not for the intent of truth. "Telling" the truth is how to garner information, although "confessing" truth is how to become absolved of truth (Caputo and Scanlon 10). Telling vs. confessing can be developed in readers by having them read works by writers who challenge their preconceived

notions of what language is doing in the text and in the world. Examining language can be practiced by reading ethically as writers are also allowed the space to write to heal. However, to understand how language is constructed is to also understand how emotions are socially constructed. With scholars like Robert Vallee examining how Augustine creates his own form of language through emotion, and J. Hillis Miller analyzing how Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a product of its cultural context toward slavery, researching how emotions and reading ethically work together is not anything new, yet the presentation of other texts for similar analyses can only advance the conversation.

First examining *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, readers can interpret what strategies occur in fiction concerning the truth of the novel's basis around suicide, classified here as a strong, traumatic emotion. By discussing fiction first, students can be objective without being concerned with sensitive material if addressed in a nonfiction text, possibly halting their thinking by becoming too emotionally attached to the experience described. However, not minimizing suicide is important despite being presented in a fictional text. Reading this text should maximize opportunity as to how students can juggle reading ethically when true and untrue elements exist within the text.

Moving onto what I have dubbed as "partial fiction," students can now assess texts that are still marketed as fiction, yet based on true events. For example, texts like *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien can have students observe how O'Brien projects his experience in the war through fiction writing and writing to heal. Unlike *Fragments* mentioned previously, assessing experience that is still compartmentalized as fiction in *The Things They Carried* can have readers not become betrayed by their emotions.

Lastly, now studying nonfiction texts like *The Liars' Club* by Mary Karr, students can interpret how Karr's depiction of her childhood simultaneously conveys truth without assuming the truth of the experiences of the people she mentions and/or describes in her memoir. Insight from Karr's book, *The Art of Memoir*, can make connections for how she does not undermine the reader's potential to assess her work ethically by first writing about what truth means to her own life. Having these distinctions assessed eases trauma theorist Jennifer Geddes's uncertainty towards trauma narratives not being mindful of containing the trauma by not distorting or reconstructing events too far from the actual experience, or the writer would lose agency and power over the experience (1). Karr still manages to vividly acknowledge the trauma that plagued her childhood without simplifying the material to minimize her own validity in the hardship of the experience.

By setting this framework for students to keep in mind the strategies always occurring in writing across different genres, they can now consider how emotion is working rhetorically and how writers consciously use emotion to either emphasize the reader's experience, or confront the writer's own experiences to reshape truth.

Conclusion

Chapter One serves to introduce existing scholarship and teaching practices for handling emotion in composition classrooms. Specifically, this chapter examines how emotion can benefit and hinder certain traditional assignments, like the personal essay. Furthermore, going beyond how the pedagogy of assignments are crafted, I consider the role of the instructor and student in the classroom, as well as pinpoint what specific emotions exist in affecting the classroom. The chapter concludes with scholarship from Laura Micciche arguing that emotion is so diverse in the classroom because of its consistent belief as an unconscious act. Micciche articulates how

teachers and scholars can examine emotion as a decisive strategy in the classroom. I consider this research on emotion as a skill in which students can sharpen their existing skill of reading texts and making them more conscious readers and writers while thinking about Keen's strategies of narrative empathy.

Thinking again of how we assume roles in creating the rules that dictate the relationship between the writer and reader in and beyond the classroom, Chapter Two seeks to represent both writer and reader when considering how each of them consciously use emotion, although also considering ethics. Citing work as early as Augustine (Caputo & Scanlon) and all the way to J. Hillis Miller, I want to exhibit how ethics has evolved throughout time and how they can be applied to textual analysis. J. Hillis Miller, in particular, extensively discusses the limitations we feel comfortable placing on ourselves when acknowledging how we have set a law of language and what happens when we choose to go beyond this lawless space. Demystifying language also further supports the deconstruction of emotions and how the reader determines what emotions are ethically present in the text, either subjectively or objectively. Deconstructing language lends itself to examining assumed lawless concepts, like temporality and truth with St. Augustine. Miller, like Micciche, emphasizes the importance of assessing how emotion is being used, especially when considering well-intended emotions like empathy. Empathy seems to disguise itself as progress by actually stunting readers by not letting them feel they have to go beyond their emotions to examine a text more deeply. Empathy also affects writers depending on how they present emotions in their writing that lends itself to empathetic responses; such is the case when writing about traumatic experiences like hurricane Katrina. Whether the writer is writing for oneself by writing as a way to heal, or by writing to communicate to the reader, or possibly both, is questionable. After assessing Suzanne Keen's theories on different types of narrative

empathy—specifically empathetic inaccuracy—that could occur within the writer, reader, and text relationship, one could wonder what texts could be discussed to contextualize all of these perspectives of writing, ethics, and emotion.

Chapter Three seeks to examine how emotions and ethics relate to the writer and reader through a series of books across genre. By first examining fiction, then “partial fiction,” and finally nonfiction, this framework creates building blocks of how emotion and ethics are strategies in assessing texts. The books discussed include *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher for fiction, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien for partial fiction, and *The Liars’ Club* by Mary Karr for nonfiction. Organizing this sequence of texts is assumed to be from introductory to more challenging when assessing emotion and ethics.

Once completing all processes of understanding emotions and ethics through texts, students should be able to approach their assignments with a comprehensive point of view with skills that extend beyond the classroom and more towards how students can practice Keen’s theory of narrative empathy and produce potential prosocial actions that are products of not only reading, but reading ethically.

CHAPTER ONE

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES: THOUGHTS TOWARDS THE WRITER

Knowing the outcome of assignments by both MacCurdy and DeBacher helps draw comparisons for how approaches to writing can vary and display the sporadic nature of emotions as mentioned previously. However, what still remains as the common thread between both assignments is a request to embrace the implications of an identity through the writing process. Although MacCurdy's method—a "visualization process"—was conscious to a point of strategy for writing with more regard to the writer's emotions than DeBacher's, there exists an unexamined layer to the writer involving the preconceived identity of himself entering the classroom. Because MacCurdy found that shaping emotion was also becoming a sense of transformation for students—as her students developed a pattern for writing about emotions like trauma—identifying memory as a key step in healing could also insinuate that identity could shift, or that students are capable to move beyond their trauma separately (179). Surpassing beyond trauma was executed by specifically focusing on the setting of the memory as a safe boundary to be able to contain the various emotions residing in the students. MacCurdy acknowledged and respected the myriad experiences of her students in her class, but there was not a way for her to have them cite their experiences beyond observation in which she could moderate, leaving the students on their own will to think about the origin of their emotions prompted by the experience being written about in the personal essay, instead of equally having the emotions produced become self-reflective. Going back to Micciche's concern with her own students favoring emotion as a predetermined factor in one's life—being haphazard and tameless—emotion can be malleable and reshaped and reconstructed. Therefore, identifying the origin of the initial construction in the first place is important.

Micciche asked her students what they thought of emotion in its most initial form, testing to see if their answers would support or come from the rhetorical notion that emotions are feminized in composition studies (*Doing Emotion* 66). Micciche's students argued, "Emotion...is unfiltered, unlike analysis, which takes form only after passing through the learned processes they have honed from writing numerous papers" (*Doing Emotion* 67). Therefore, although MacCurdy's strategy in allowing space for emotion in the classroom is constructive, the strategy does not factor how students could approach the assignment by writing what is expected of them, not just as a writer with an inventory of personal hardship, but as a student aware that his personal experience is ultimately reflected in the form of a grade. In this case, emotion is conscious in an institutional context for a writer simultaneously identifying as a student, but also claiming the identity of a writer coupled with the identity of being a human being, making distinction between identities complex.

Thinking of how emotion becomes constructed is also to consider what emotions teeter on embellishment and are held in higher regard and priority. "Embellishment" here is not about the experience itself, or even the emotions from an experience, but the embellishment of narrative. Scholar Kathlyn Conway was concerned with the physical implications that emotions like trauma caused on bodies, but was also interested in what solutions existed to alleviate the symptoms associated with illness. Conway found that people found solace in absorbing the stories of others, and that storytelling fostered a sense of hope that also produced an empathetic response within the reader (11). However, Conway was critical of what patterns occurred in the most popular texts that people seemed to gravitate towards. One such genre of texts was memoir, and Conway found that by instilling this sense of hope simultaneously creates a negative construction of emotion. Called the "triumph narrative," Conway discovered a dismissive quality

that literature entailed—specifically with memoir—and how its readership was partially possible due to resolved storylines and generally happy endings (17). By creating a marketable presentation of experience through nonfiction, reading as a coping mechanism to trauma itself is questionable, as reading takes its own form of ethics, such as how writing does when considering if emotions are conscious or unconscious. Conway discusses that although trauma can create its own path for “triumph narrative,” the narrative should also be admissible to allow darker elements of memoir to take the spotlight (10). Trauma itself is not an isolated emotion because of the potential to dip into other emotions like grief. Remembering that emotions exist sporadically also means each emotion can be defined subjectively through social constructions. Therefore, what is trauma as its own social construction?

Gerard Fromm examines how trauma is generated by disaster holistically as opposed to the specific experiences cited by DeBacher’s students. There is potential that in the face of disaster, grief can be silenced when generalized (Fromm 175). Disaster is an opportunity for reshaping language and reality, and although this construction of reality is happening, distinctions are established among trauma victims that there is the difference between the trauma of an event versus the trauma of becoming silenced by unacknowledged grief (Fromm 175). Fromm then deciphers what empathetic responses occur within the wake of disaster and how people may either—perhaps unconsciously in an effort to solidify their grief—attempt to speak over others and take a direct response and agency to trauma (180). Positioning oneself against trauma that could consequently make trauma a specific identifier to the self, accidentally becomes a looming presence in one’s life much like these “moments of being” and “shock” for Virginia Woolf.

A similar sense of understanding how emotions can conflict while still allowing room for intrigue and process is through compositionist Rachel Spears's "wounded healer pedagogy." Spears herself is a teacher also concerned with navigating through a student's emotions while writing and is cautious of the transformative nature that emotion seems to lend itself to as a pattern in composition studies. Her thoughts are similar to Conway's in a way that trauma is not something necessarily to become triumphed over, but can become neutralized. Conceptualizing triumph narratives would equate with an idea of completeness, with which Spears disagrees. Spears believes that the writer of specific elicited emotions, like trauma, is never fully immune to the possibility of retraumatization (68). By taking ownership over one's emotions, as Fromm found people do in times of crisis, and transplanting the experience at hand by writing about the experience onto a confined space, the trauma becomes usurped by the writer and not the other way around. Thus, allowing a reconstruction of the self and having a greater understanding of the concept of identity and its influence can reimagine how emotion and writing interplay.

Combining this concern for emotion and identity, as well as implementation of self-reflective writing techniques, fellow teacher Mary Nicolini incorporated letter writing pedagogy in her classroom assignment revolving around the death penalty (76). She outlines her experience by introducing anonymity, and in doing so, obstructs the quick assertions by Micciche's students about emotion having an instinctive quality (*Doing Emotion* 67). If students were unable to rely on their identity, such as their race, class, and other factors, then they would have to support their opinions on the death penalty through other means, such as listening, critically thinking, and reflecting on why they initially had the opinion they did. Students struggled to defend their personas that existed in a private and public platform, as well as to hold a stance on the personal nature of the letters from fellow students they would read, feeling conflicted if presented with

opposing ideas (Nicolini 76). Nicolini effectively had the students elicit empathy through a practical and productive classroom exercise that used therapeutic writing as well by expressing personal writing about a specific social issue. The use of anonymity also infers an aspect of safety to the students' vulnerability to sharing potential trauma towards the death penalty.

The dynamic between instructor and student becomes just as nuanced as identifying how emotion becomes conscious or unconscious by questioning not just the writer or student, but how the instructor remains as a factor in influencing the ambiance of the classroom. Spears specifically mentions how instructors, atop of attempting "wounded healer pedagogy," should not attempt to become a makeshift therapist in the classroom (68). The debate around how therapeutic writing can exist in the classroom with instructors piloting the curriculum is met with mixed reception.

In a similar vein for finding ways to incorporate constructive emotions in the classroom through an academic lens, Eric Leake believes in empathy as rhetoric, citing its possibilities for various functions, including reason, emotion, and judgement ("Writing"). In terms of the actual writing process itself, Leake claims the process of invention, such as considering audience and situation of writing, is important to establish other empathetic rhetoric like listening skills. In so many assignments covering an argumentative stance, for instance, Leake considers how empathy could interpret such assignments as using more interrogatory language, having students realize that it is not about winning arguments, but fully understanding them. Similar stories of other writing instructors, such as Benjamin Batzer, are concerned with the lack of empathetic awareness in the classroom, as he poses that there are not enough writing prompts eliciting the choice for documenting trauma (here defined as painful experiences) that can produce healing in the classroom, as Batzer believes therapeutic writing can benefit everyone in some way

(“Healing”). Writing is a neutral action that develops meaning by the writer over time. However, the intent of writing cannot quite entirely be projected, as the interpretations can differ upon writer and reader. Thus, we might assume that evolved perceptions of writing must stem from some inner force—such as empathy—that assesses how readers may care for specific parts of writing, like characters, plot, and setting. Although both Batzer’s and Leake’s intentions are noble, they could dangerously project their assessment of empathy onto a student, veering them into potential retraumatization or a conflict of identity, a possibility discussed earlier by Spears. If assessing trauma can become problematic under the context of interpreting therapeutic writing, how can teachers still implement empathy without pushing boundaries? Peter Elbow devised what is known as “free-writing” in an effort to materialize work for the “teacherless” classroom (3). Elbow found catharsis when he didn’t have to worry about any room for error that was pushed so strongly in his curriculum (6). Free-writing is a technique that fosters the intent of self-reflection, creating an admissible space for emotion as a constructive force in the classroom. Even still, although safeguards like this can be in place for students to reign in their emotions, is doing so restrictive to the process of conscious versus unconscious emotion? Do students end up filtering their emotional options that are appropriate for academic institutions?

Inquiries like this are what Micciche has researched extensively, with all discussed scholarship demonstrating how tricky it is to consider emotion in the context of the writer, why the writer writes, and how the writer becomes limited depending on the space and assignments provided to him. However, Micciche believes in a “deep embodiment pedagogy” that can seek to resolve how these conscious factors for affecting a student’s emotions through writing in the classroom can translate to seeing emotion as a rhetorical strategy as well. Micciche demonstrates a style of teaching that goes beyond writing and reading, and instead asks students to consider

how the physicality of movement and acknowledging our bodies also takes up space in realizing how our dispositions already speak for us in relation to the world. “Deep embodiment pedagogy” is described as an act of performance to go beyond “what a text makes me realize about myself” and think more about, “what it is like to move around the world in a different body” (*Doing Emotion* 60). Confronting students with needing to take ownership of perceived emotions demands that their hesitancy and questionability in how to articulate language and emotion through movements of the body makes the concept of emotions as performative more prevalent, and quite literal. Micciche does not seek to absolve writing as a means of analysis and does not praise this idea of literal performance as any superior to it (*Doing Emotion* 57). Her goal is to diversify pedagogical approaches, especially when thinking about the existing types of “movement” that exists in writing and reading, as she cites Margaret Syverson explaining, “Neither writing nor reading can be accomplished without physical activity: clasping a book, moving the eyes across a line of text, using the muscles of the hand, arms, and fingers to handle a pen or keyboard...One of the salient features of academic life is the massive suppression of awareness of this physical relationship” (qtd. in *Doing Emotion* 56).

Although I am intrigued by the physicality of this movement that is later demonstrated by Micciche’s students in order to pinpoint how they all interpret emotion differently, I want to direct attention to an assignment conceived by Micciche that required students to bring in recordings of themselves orally reading a selected text, from a choice of three, presented to them. Micciche had students get in groups of two or three and decide what part of their assigned text demonstrated emotion at a high level. In doing so, the act of deciding what emotion is in this context acknowledges, again, the consciousness of what is “emotional,” especially when having to agree with fellow classmates. Micciche explains, “The passage need not be emotive in a

conventional sense—using first-person, confessing a disturbing or moving truth, or writing directly about emotion—for, as I have suggested, economics of feeling are always in circulation, moving among bodies and objects, and generating attachment as well as detachment” (*Doing Emotion* 57). Next, students record themselves reading the text aloud, bring the recording to class, and assess any differences between group members assigned the same text, but convey emotion differently. The exercise reveals how students are able to comprehend how they read and absorb texts, and thus, reveal how they construct emotion, can make writing and reading more conscious acts. As mentioned previously, Micciche extends this oral presentation to live performance, having students embody the assigned text and perform its content in order to translate the emotion in its entirety (*Doing Emotion* 57). Doing an activity like this also creates a space for considering other factors for why students may read, write, and audibly speak about texts so differently when analyzing ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and more.

As is the case when Micciche had her students read an excerpt by James Baldwin, one of Micciche’s students described Baldwin as being too blinded by his anger to help his cause toward social justice (*Doing Emotion* 58). Later, after Micciche’s class exercise involving performing emotion, the same student changed her mind about Baldwin, citing that she was able to understand Baldwin’s perspective due to the emotional turmoil he experienced between himself and his father (*Doing Emotion* 59). Micciche ruminates about how race becomes attached to certain emotions like anger, although conflict involving family gets more critical observation than social issues like race. The students seem to acknowledge that topics like family are accessible for interpreting unity and understanding, unlike race, as Micciche’s student described family as “encompassing everyone” (*Doing Emotion* 59).

An observation like this lends itself to questioning other constructions, like “What is family?” or “Who is ‘everyone?’” and leaves wiggle room for being able to moderate how every student is anticipated to articulate and construct language and meaning. However, Micciche’s insistence on performing texts by embodying the experience of others confronts students with more direct responsibility for how to translate emotion to an audience, even if the experiences are not their own. “Deep embodiment pedagogy” still considers the politicized identities and the double meanings they can take when related to specific emotions while being performed by people not identifying with earlier factors, like race. Micciche discusses how composition scholar Wendy Brown was concerned with “wounded attachments” (*Doing Emotion* 39). Brown explains, “A wound represents a physical, mental, and political place of hurt and injury; it functions as an authenticating pain that is both a point of contention and a site of shared identity” (qtd. in *Doing Emotion* 39). A sense of hardship and wound attachments acknowledged, Micciche explains, becomes a place for productive writing to flourish when students are able to analyze these types of experiences they assume to lack to inspire their writing. However, determining how constructive using suffering and pain is as an appropriate approach to develop writing and to construct identity is debatable. Moreover, the existing efforts in moving past “unhappy” emotions in composition studies as well as creating a balance between having writing be therapeutic vs. academic is consistently reinforced (*Doing Emotion* 40). These observations also reinforce Spears’s thoughts on her own “wounded healer pedagogy” specifying the agency the student should be able to secure throughout the writing process, including the “unhappy” emotions that trauma would fall under, without the instructor becoming too invasive to the experience. In Micciche’s case, having her student understand her own emotions through performance of the body and then later read a text by Baldwin, allows a compare and contrast to

take place and then a reconstruction of identity for the student to assess her emotions. Micciche does become an involved instructor. Although not in a way like Leake or Batzer, she lets her students develop their own self-discovery with their own emotions through her assigned texts and pedagogy. Micciche's approach to teaching becomes more apparent when exposed to what inspired her developed pedagogy throughout the years.

Still intrigued by how literal movement is a display of developing and translating emotion, Micciche observed a class for teens hosted by dancer Lisa Tsetse (Jacobs & Micciche 47). Micciche explains a specific instance of this class that involved an improv exercise involving identity construction by looping rope into a series of circles. There was one giant circle formed by the rope, and then a smaller circle made of rope contained within the larger circle. With Tsetse's lead, she began to move her body in accordance to how her body would react to being within either of the circles made. Micciche explains that the larger circle represented a sense of "Self." When a body inhabited the "Self" space, the body would move in accordance to how the body assumed movements depending on the social construction of others, or, the public. The smaller circle within this "Self" circle was still considered a place where the "Self" existed, but in a more private space (Jacobs & Micciche 48). Having these layers of "Self" also acknowledges the existing binary that would match similar distinctions like private vs. public spaces. In this case, the opposite of "Self" is described as "Other," where the social constructions of identity take place, which would be the space outside of the larger circle. Similarly, the reasoning behind having two "Self" circles and not just one circle to distinguish "Self" vs. "Other" is to acknowledge the "inner" and "outer" selves we construct.

By having these spaces accommodate different ways of allowing the body to move in relation to perceived emotion, the differing movements between each space acknowledges a set

construction of understanding which emotions through movement are admissible and inadmissible, assuming these movements cannot exist simultaneously by moving in and out of the circles. Micciche articulates her observations of this exercise by realizing how her interpretations of moving her own body in these spaces differed from others:

Movement, then, gave form to emotion, embodying the social controls that regulated our bodies. The limits of how we could feel were materially manifested in the limits on how we could move. For instance, as the group moved, I not only felt my own individual movements as movements but felt them in relation to the movements of others. I saw in their movements possibilities I had not previously imagined. I also saw how the movements I made were reflected in others. This awareness of others actually fostered an exchange of movements between one mover and another. New movements were improvised from the existing social constructions. The “either/or” constructions of the binary oppositions were transformed into a more reciprocal “with/and” through this exchange. Our improvisations, then, re-visioned the oppositional social constructions that had regulated our bodies and our emotions. The binary oppositions could not, in any absolute sense, contain all of what our bodies actually enacted, or, in turn, what we felt. (Jacobs & Micciche 50)

Even with measures in place, like the ropes forming circles to clearer identify where specific emotions can take place, Micciche realizes that even by participating in the exercise, simultaneous emotions can occur to distort, challenge, and even refute the existing binaries the exercise creates, even if perhaps well-intended to better grasp that emotions are selective and conscious within specific criteria. Micciche develops a binary for her own observations by categorizing emotion within this exercise as either being a demonstration of “emotional control” or “emotional freedom” (Jacobs and Micciche 51).

“Emotional control” is described by Micciche, through the exercise, as moments of being self-aware with how the body can perform certain emotions within the spaces provided, whether being the larger circle or the smaller circle, and consciously controlling when and how the body will move. “Emotional freedom” serves as the opposite of emotional control, as Micciche cites that the emotions themselves pilot the body and are assumed to come from outside of the

individual as a response to emotion as it arises, unlike the control of one's emotions being a conscious action (Jacobs & Micciche 52).

Micciche applies these concepts when observing a student of Tsetse's class as he decides to not participate in the improv exercise. At first assuming that the student, James, was uncomfortable with his body to demonstrate his sense of movement, Micciche realized that James's apathy was a justified demonstration of "movement" as well. On one hand, not moving was a sense of defining movement, as well as feelings of self-consciousness when the exercise exhibited "emotional freedom" and "emotional control" because James was consciously not participating, although letting his feelings of discomfort run rampant (Jacobs & Micciche 52).

At first interpreting James's behavior in another binary context, Micciche understood that instead of seeing James as either participating or not participating, she considered the other binary being a more inclusive "both/and" as Tsetse herself approaches James and moves her body in response to his version of "moving" still allowing James access to the experience, because being outside of the larger circle was still as imperative to the construction of identity as being in the circle or in the smaller circle as well (Jacobs & Micciche 52).

The exercise, along with Micciche's observations, calls back to Woolf's feelings of "shock" and how Woolf's articulation of her "moments of being" might be compartmentalized in these circles of identity. Because Woolf has her own binary of moments of "being/nonbeing," there is the possibility that her formulaic movements of her body when remembering her "moments of nonbeing," like performing household chores, exist within her "outer self," although her "moments of being" dwells within her smaller circle or "inner self." Micciche explains, according to the exercise by Tsetse, that the circles are able to establish "what is seen by few people, if any" (Jacobs & Micciche 49). Moreover, whether or not Woolf considers

herself at these times in “emotional control” or displaying “emotional freedom” could depend on multiple factors. One way of this sense of control could be an analysis of Woolf’s own writing, assuming that she, as a writer, selectively showcases her experiences in her unfinished memoir with the intent to directly include the reader in the experience by teaching him about himself and others (Hagen 266). Yet, the sense of freedom could be with the ambiguity that is a sense of “shock” with “moments of being,” as well as the response to this being Hagen’s own “sensuous pedagogy.” The relationship between Woolf and Hagen might indicate that both Woolf and Hagen display “emotional control” or “emotional freedom” at the same time, calling back to Keen’s “empathetic inaccuracy.”

The idea of these formed circles in Tsetse’s exercise is also an effective way of understanding the relationship between writers, readers, and the combinations of each of them existing—and even moving back and forth—between larger/smaller circles, inner/outer selves, and the concept of Self/Other. The experience between James and Tsetse in itself is its own contained experience, to which could have its own combinations and perspectives between each of them, but becomes more nuanced with Micciche observing their relationship with how they perform their own sense of movement. Micciche developing her own conclusions and revelations with understanding how emotion is working within the exercise between them does not necessarily mean those same revelations have to agree with James and Tsetse’s own experience. Even more specifically, this nonverbal communication extends to examining how certain emotions, like trauma and empathy, also quietly immerse themselves in writers and readers and take on different ways of “moving.”

Determining how these specific emotions are working requires extensive inquiry toward the motivations from the writer and how the reader reacts to the writing itself. If Micciche’s

observations prove anything, she insinuates that this relationship for emotion to exist requires the efforts of writer and respondent/reader alike, or in this case, writer and instructor. Furthermore, using Suzanne Keen's theory of narrative empathy to understand narrative strategies across genres of texts can open access to interrogate how emotion is working rhetorically. Before that can be achieved, understanding how language constructs emotions like trauma and empathy is imperative to laying a foundation for remaining as critical and objective readers. The solution to learning how to not let our emotions dissuade us is by learning how to read ethically. In doing so, we can create a conversation as readers between the reader and ourselves, the reader and the writer, and the reader and the community. By considering all identity circles and participants within Tsetse's exercise as Micciche describes, we can manage our emotions—whether selectively through “emotional control” or “emotional freedom”—and let our innate prosocial behavior toward empathetic response to the “movements” of others match other justifiable and “unhappy” emotions like trauma without dismissing them.

CHAPTER TWO

EMOTION THROUGH ETHICS: THOUGHTS TOWARDS THE READER

Understanding how a writer can consciously describe his own emotions—especially traumatic ones—is a transformative experience. As readers, becoming witnesses to this writing, whether through speech or through ideas of “movement” that Micciche describes prior, understanding how writing has multiple approaches is the same for how reading has multiple approaches, and how emotions are at play during both processes. In the way that preconceived ideas and constructs of emotions become reimagined or presented through writing, how readers determine these presentations of emotion is also a valid and important experience. Between this writer and reader relationship, there also occurs the empowering notion of absence and renewal: the idea that reconstruction of experience and memories can produce a new truth. As writers are able to reconstruct their memories and produce new meaning for them, their emotions also become vulnerable throughout the process. Importance is placed upon the reader to be able to gauge and respond to these experiences ethically.

Teaching how to read and write ethically is not a foreign concept in composition studies. Wayne C. Booth, a scholar of ethics, remembers how ethics was discussed enthusiastically in tandem with postmodernism among academics, yet found minimal mention of the importance of ethics being taught to their students, even in his own work with *The Company We Keep* (“Ethics of Teaching” 44). Booth is also mindful of his role as an instructor possibly imposing his own idea of ethics onto his students. He examines how institutional settings, like schools, instill persuasion toward learning the skills students need to become employed versus the skills they need to become rounded human beings. Booth states, “We hope to produce a kind of person, and we do not want to be authoritarian about it, and yet we often realize, with some uneasiness about our arrogance, that the kind of person we want them to become is the same kind that we want to become—and want them to see us as already having achieved” (“Ethics of Teaching” 47).

Likewise, Booth discusses the necessity for stories being able to go beyond a teacher's understanding and responsibility in moderating how reading and writing ethically could occur in the classroom:

The irrefutable reason all this is important is that our most powerful ethical influences—except perhaps for parental modeling—are stories: it is in responding to, taking in, becoming transported by story that character is formed, for good or ill. Stories that listeners really listen to are powerful self-creators: they can create or reinforce bad ethos or good. They can transform us in self-destructive directions or they can turn us into would-be heroes. (“Ethics of Teaching” 49)

Booth goes on to even present six suggestions for teaching ethics in the classroom by incorporating a text. Perhaps the most important problem, Booth says, is being able to have students create a critical discussion about the text at hand (“Ethics of Teaching” 52). The problem becomes easier to penetrate given Booth's earlier suggestions, such as picking a story that intentionally depicts flawed characters, generally ones that students can find themselves engaged with (“Ethics of Teaching” 50). In doing so, students should be able to immerse themselves within the development of these characters from a perspective of empathetic inquiry, bound to disrupt their emotional capacities, and therefore—hopefully—instigate an investigation for how narrative comprises of strategic components for combinations of different reading experiences.

Learning how to read ethically not only teaches the reader how to become conscious of empathetic response and potential prosocial behavior that Keen describes but also secures the agency of the writer. These results are important given past analyses with how reading and responding to trauma through texts has given an accidental shaping in how to approach reading emotion. As trauma scholars Stef Craps and Gert Buelens state in regard to how readers interpret postcolonial novels, “the latter responds to the witness's testimony by showing empathy, a reaction that supposedly obviates any need for critical self-reflection regarding his or her own

implication in ongoing practices of oppression and denial, let alone political mobilization against those practices” (5). Trauma remains as a focus for scholarship between writer and reader given the diversion of “unhappy emotions” that Micciche describes becoming frequent within composition studies (*Doing Emotion* 40). Furthermore, just as Fromm discusses how trauma becomes quick to signify in the wake of disaster, the signification also quickly silences and generalizes the trauma of others involved (175). A reader’s goal is to become an informed—and conscious—recipient when exposed to traumatic emotions without being quick to favor the resolve of the context described by the writer. Trauma begins to take form as its own independent narrative, built upon how Western society simultaneously handles trauma as a valid experience, yet dismisses as an inadmissible emotion.

J. Hillis Miller’s book, *The Ethics of Reading* (1987), examines the works of writers observing their own work and stresses ethics as a product of close reading and its effects on the reader and writer. Miller states, “[L]iterature does not make history, but is made by it” (*Ethics* 8). Each text presented to oneself is an admission to projecting one’s emotions onto the material. Assessing content outside of the text itself is also important so that the reader recognizes becoming bound by the “law” of language (*Ethics* 10). Citing the scholarship of Derrida, Miller discusses a reader’s absence of free will when engaging with a text. Each text has its own narrative structure that is unique to affecting the text’s properties, like characters and setting. Miller points out these variables in storytelling to suggest that although a text becomes new to the reader, the narrative already becomes complete by having a beginning, middle, and end, whereas “story” is identified as being separate from narrative (*Ethics* 33). “Story” in this case might relate more closely to Miller’s idea about there being an “ethical moment” when confronted by a text. The “ethical moment” is comprised of the author, narrator, character, and

reader (*Ethics* 9). “Story” becomes an interpretive space that exists outside of the four pieces for the “ethical moment” to transpire and is assumed to be boundless by the law of language Miller describes.

By identifying this formula for how to read ethically, Miller denounces a reader’s potential initial thoughts that what is being read is solely decreed as truth by himself. Examining literature through this deconstructive lens is a way to also approach emotion deconstructively. Referring back to the “law” of literature—or what comprises the ethical moment—Miller suggests to not read from the perspective of oneself as a reader, but to project oneself onto the character, because the characters truly exist within the text, whereas the reader should distance oneself by not becoming too involved. In not doing so, Miller hypothesizes that there is the possibility a reader becomes desensitized to the character’s development and potential struggles throughout the text, leaving the reader to seek fulfillment of his own reading pleasure (*Ethics* 23). The idea of desensitization recalls the ideas presented by Craps and Buelens and how accidentally dismissing the underlying traumatic emotions being presented to the reader is easy. Desensitization may also be Keen’s intent behind narrative empathy as a strategy, similar to what Miller suggests, that emphasizing the role of “character” has the reader gain perspective although also validating those underlying traumatic emotions. When presented with a work of fiction, having the reader assume to read from an ethical perspective is harder to establish in comparison to a nonfiction text. Miller does cite that examining fictional narratives is easier to test one’s ethical reading because the law of the literature at hand is disposable and accessible for constant reevaluation (*Ethics* 28). However, Miller had the same hesitancy as other trauma theorists scaffolding upon his scholarship years later, wondering, how can one read nonfiction texts ethically?

Miller attempts to demystify the nuance in assessing nonfiction texts by also considering the cultural context in which a book's publication might coexist. Although still a fictitious text, in Miller's reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Miller observes how Morrison claims in the foreword of *Beloved*, "[L]anguage needs to get out of the way" (qtd. in *Conflagration* 232). Morrison claims that the structure of *Beloved* is a way to allow language to become a resource for conveying a pastiche of slavery as a personal experience for the reader. With pastiche indicating the postmodern era of literature at the time (*Conflagration* 232), Miller analyzes how *Beloved*'s Sethe is a character that consciously commits an immoral act, yet becomes complex where to gauge a character's ethics if assumed to be done for the well-being of others. In Sethe's case, by killing her baby, Beloved, she believes she was saving her by not allowing her to exist in slavery. Miller states, "One might even argue that what Sethe does, like Abraham's offering to sacrifice his dearly beloved only son, are exemplary ethical acts, precisely because they are programmed by no moral or community law. They are beyond the law, or outside the law" (*Conflagration* 266). Miller concludes that the ethical moment ultimately befalls the person that must make the decision in its immediacy, although the construction of the consequence of that decision is even historically different between men and women (*Conflagration* 267). For Sethe, as she becomes ostracized by the community for her crime, Miller also acknowledges that the exact meaning of *Beloved* becomes undetermined despite its extensive resourcefulness for critical inquiry. Miller references the analysis by Katrina Harack about toward the ending of *Beloved* that observes "[T]o pass on...it can mean to pass the story onto others, to transmit it, and it can mean to let it pass, to forget it. Morrison's formulation is double or antiethical. It says two opposing things at once" (qtd. in *Conflagration* 255). Having a plausible analysis like this one makes it more complex to comprehend *Beloved*'s ethical impact when determining whether

the narrator—the same one that advises to not pass the story on—is the voice of Beloved, the baby Sethe had killed. Having memories and temporality disrupted with *Beloved*'s omniscient narrator (another indicator of a postmodern novel, according to Miller) makes determining ethics all the more extensive.

Or is that final word, “Beloved,” a perlocutionary cry, a rememory, an invocation or conjuration, by the narrative voice, beyond all forgetting, of the absent ghost? It seems as if the narrative voice could not bear to forget, even though the community has forgotten and may even be justified in doing so. Does that narrative voice not perhaps speak, and has it perhaps not always spoken, from the first words of the novel on, from “the other side,” that is, from the realm where nothing ever dies? A novel is, after all, something that generates its reality from the medium of words on the page. Those words are a material reality with performative force. By means of those words, nothing ever dies in the specific sense that it is resurrected anew every time the novel is read by anyone, anywhere, in a growing community of readers. It is impossible to be sure just how to read this final word. (*Conflagration* 257)

These inquiries by Miller can be resolved by further investigating how nonfiction texts work when perceived ethically and morally, considering the actions presented in these texts become more costly because the writer remains open to ethical scrutiny by readers, much like how Sethe does by her own community even as a fictitious character. Furthermore, Sethe's murder has strong emotional charges, both from herself and those around her, as emotion, ethics, and morals are in constant exchange.

While reading nonfiction texts, it is important to still consider Miller's main components of what make up the “ethical moment” and how certain elements of nonfiction texts—like memories, trauma, and story—shape in comparison. A starting point for ethically assessing either nonfiction work or work inspired by true events is for the reader to understand a writer's intent to possibly write to heal from past experience. As previously discussed with how writers are able to consciously channel their emotions through writing by means of various pedagogies throughout the history of composition studies, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth reinforces how

writing serves as a conscious act of securing one's agency over experiences. Unlike Spears, perhaps, Caruth believes that the nonverbal status that is brought upon some trauma victims as a consequence of the trauma is still valid and does not have to be readily overcome (Robinett 290). Because memories become a component in shaping traumatic narratives, the structure and linearity of narrative would become chaotic in nature (Robinett 296). Again, this parallels with Woolf's intentions behind her own writing in her unfinished memoir by attempting to make sense of these moments of "shock" described (Hagen 270). Along with recalling memories, one would also have to consciously elicit and wrangle emotions from the traumatic experience itself, gauging oneself through one's writing as to not accidentally resurface the trauma.

However, when articulating what constitutes as trauma by means of emotion, the reader should be able to understand the strategies of narrative versus story as Miller does in regard to the "ethical moment." For example, Jennifer Geddes discusses the ethics of understanding trauma narratives from a reader and writer's perspective. On one hand, approaching how to write a trauma narrative presents a set of obstacles for how existing trauma narratives are already constructed. Geddes recommends that writers should remain skeptical to their own memories when concerning trauma. With the potential to accidentally filter the trauma either through the distortion or simplification of memories, Geddes believe that doing so would not allow the writer the fullest agency over the traumatic experience (1). Having this level of altering memories, Geddes describes, would come from whether or not the writer writes objectively. If so, objective writing—or writing purely factitiously of the experience—would be condoning the trauma itself (4). Even going beyond this condoning of trauma and securing one's agency, the larger narrative context of the traumatic situation remains undefined. Readers, then, are crucial in aiding the writer to construct the narrative of the trauma to establish new meaning. Geddes prompts the

reader to not only consider the possibility of interpreting trauma through narrative as a series of clichés based on past exposure to trauma narrative, but asks the reader to challenge what purposes exist to discuss trauma in an institutional context (2). Whether reading for pleasure or for research, both are also a form of reading ethically due to the motivations behind reading the text. However, thinking of trauma more critically and how trauma shapes a reader's capacity for empathy, for example, better lends itself to the deconstructive and postmodern quality of the law of language that Miller describes, and how readers can unlearn the framework of what is expected to be read in trauma narratives. Fellow trauma theorist Kali Tal also considers the layers to how readers react to and understand trauma through three plausible options: myth, medical, and disappearance (Geddes 12). "Myth" is a means of reconstructing the trauma by simplifying it to a lesser version of itself, "medical" is labeling trauma as an illness deemed curable, and "disappearance" is completely refuting the trauma's existence (12). Having these "laws" in place for how to understand trauma simultaneously showcases how society seeks to rationalize emotion, but also gives greater insight as to how emotion, as response, is conscious through these options.

Whether or not these labels for how to respond to trauma are effective or not is not the main focus. Although these attempts at constructions serve as a parallel for how we try to "read" emotions and how Miller argues we read literature, understanding how memory works in relation to trauma is important. Understanding how memory is so close to association for concepts like what is true versus not true is also apparent for how a reader examines labels like fiction versus nonfiction texts. Writers can secure their agency with trauma by reconstructing truth through memory, but what is the reader's capacity for challenging texts if everything presented to them is

true? Would challenging an intimate glimpse of a writer's traumatic experience be unethical, or make the reader more ethical for seeing how emotion is working in narrative?

Perhaps the most culminating example to these inquiries is Benjamin Wilkomirski's memoir *Fragments* published in 1995. Notorious for its reader's skepticism towards certain recounts of Wilkomirski's life, such as curiosity towards his birth records entailed within the Holocaust memoir, the book was ultimately pulled from shelves later in 1998 (Hungerford 67). Despite these revelations about Wilkomirski's false memoir, readers still felt attached to the experience of reading the memoir as a testament of a traumatic narrative. A part of understanding how emotions work within this context is a reminder of the "triumph narrative" discussed by Kathlyn Conway previously, and how memoir in itself is its own narrative structure, one that Miller understands as being a part of deciding the "ethical moment" regarding where an author might situate himself among narrator, character, and reader. Therefore, this reinforcement is made clearer by Hungerford also stating, "[T]he narrative comes first, the claim to experience—and to biology, which never ceases to matter even if it is subject to revisions—follows" (71). Miller might suggest that the "ethical moment" here examines "character." In this case, Wilkomirski becomes the projection of the reader's trust and observation of the "laws" within the memoir's context. Because *Fragments* details memories of the Holocaust, readers become susceptible to relying on their innate emotional response to such content: empathy. To dispute the content presented to the reader would be to challenge the experience of Wilkomirski and his assumed traumas. Doing so not only becomes an issue in recognizing the true versus untrue elements of stories, but understanding our emotional responses at whether or not readers become most deceived by untrue experience or by becoming most deceived because of their empathetic output. Miller, in a reading of Kant, explains that once readers become emotionally betrayed by

the text they begin to “hover away” (*Ethics* 39). In a sense, acknowledging emotional betrayal as a response from a text is a form of reading ethically, by approaching the writer with skepticism. Even still, this sense of betrayal befalls upon a reader rushing to his emotions and satisfying oneself and not seeking to understand the writer. An example of this might be if a reader of *Beloved* were to generalize slavery based on its singular, emotional, and ethically charged narrative, proceeding to make assumptions toward Toni Morrison as a fellow black woman, much like how Micciche’s student initially interpreted reading Baldwin.

However, scholar Shoshana Felman is also concerned with this inaccuracy for emotional response when presented with traumatic narratives. Teaching a “Literature and Testimony” seminar, Felman sought out to find a framework for her students to constructively assess experiencing traumatic narratives. Her findings proved to be effective:

Felman describes how the class, after viewing the first of the two Holocaust testimonies, experienced a “crisis” in which the students were “entirely at a loss, disoriented and uprooted.” What the students needed, Felman concluded, was to be brought “back into significance” (48), and to accomplish this she prepared an “address to the class” that would “return” to the students “the importance and significance of their reactions” (49). (qtd. In Hungerford, “Memorizing Memory” 73)

What is unique about this class exercise is how Felman chooses to show the students a second tape pertaining to a Holocaust testimony. Adopting a “survivor” mentality based on witnessing the first video, students were able to somewhat prepare—emotionally—for the second tape. By viewing both tapes, and instead of adopting the experience of these traumas as one’s own, like Wilkomirski did, the students were able to articulate their emotional responses beyond just between the two tapes by completing their final writing assignment. Felman concluded this exercise of introducing trauma in the classroom by having students respond to the assigned texts throughout the semester in conjunction with the responses from the tapes.

Felman says the responses, “turned out to be an amazingly articulate, reflective and profound statement of the trauma they had gone through and of the significance of their assuming the position of the witness” (Hungerford 73). With this class exercise, trauma itself is able to become transmissible from person to person despite the personal and intimate nature of the experience. Felman’s students also demonstrated a version of “reading” ethically by being exposed to the Holocaust testimonial tapes. Furthermore, by having more than one tape, and thus, more than one voice to claim the experience of the Holocaust itself, the conversation becomes much more global instead of singular, such as with Wilkomirski’s memoir.

Although poorly executed, *Fragments* as a work may still have had valid intentions in regard to understanding one’s trauma. Wilkomirski’s misguidance with adopting the trauma he was learning through the Holocaust may still have been an attempt at securing some sort of miscellaneous trauma he may have lost due to a phenomenon known as “traumatic amnesia” (Pederson 338). Cathy Caruth cites the neurological symptoms of a trauma victim often being unable to articulate his experiences fully and verbally. By relying on one’s memories, there is the potential to secure one’s agency over trauma by detecting it before it resurfaces and impacts the functionality of the survivor. Therefore, understanding why a writer may write, especially through narrative structures like memoir, indicates the tricky navigation for how to tell stories. Just as language, at a deconstructive level, is a tool in consciously creating narratives and abiding by the laws of language, selectively showcasing memories also allows this reconstruction of the self to occur. Although emotional responses like trauma may be unconscious, there seems to be not an absence of detail, but an overflow of information specific to any singular trauma (Pederson 339). If Caruth believes that trauma victims may only be comfortable steering their traumas through acts like writing, the writing is still valid. However, dangers still become

evident, such as false memories and the chance at still not claiming any unregistered traumas, thus not claiming the experience fully. For scholar Josh Pederson, the most pressing concern for this attempt at having emotional agency over trauma is by preventing any occurrences of dissociative episodes (340). Although the trauma itself may appear secured and not resurfaced, nor forgotten completely through amnesia, Pederson points to the lack of scholarship on not just the memories in question themselves, but the temporality of memory. Pederson believes that having trauma victims understand why their recounts of memory still remain altered, through temporality and not content, may create more satisfying agency over their memories (339). Even if the objective truth of the trauma becomes claimed by the writer by articulating the experience from a healing perspective, not acknowledging the affective change throughout the process is a critical component of how the reader can truly understand the experience. Understanding how time may become distorted to the victim would also have effects on the writing produced, thus leaving the reader without the best sense of accessibility to truth that the writer is attempting to make. Pederson cites the responses of witnesses to a school shooting as an example of the distortion of time:

‘My sense of time changed—things seemed to be happening in slow motion,’ ‘What was happening seemed unreal to me, like I was in a dream or watching a movie or play,’ ‘I felt as though I was a spectator watching what was happening to me,’ ‘There were moments when my sense of my own body seemed distorted or changed.’ (qtd. in Pederson 339-340)

To understand temporality is to still have a deconstructive approach to language. Just like how a reader must go beyond an empathetic response, a writer must consider how the initial claiming of an experience related to trauma may still require intensive examination for how containing the trauma has had potential affective consequences on oneself, clouding the pure truth waiting to be

unearthed and relieved. If discovering truth is the most deconstructive one can get when trying to go beyond emotional traumas, then does “truth” have its own call for deconstruction?

A figurehead for seeking this sense of what truth means and is, St. Augustine wrestled with concepts of temporality and his own relationship with God. After becoming jaded with pursuits of pleasure and of life in general, Augustine considers two proponents of achieving some sort of transcendent truth: Eternity and Time (Rahman 26). “Eternity” was the temporal realm belonging to God, although the human experience was contained through “Time.” Thinking of temporality in a filtered way, such as through time in comparison to eternity, argued that without time there would be a lack toward consciousness (Rahman 27). If one only knew of a concept like eternity, there would be no drive to seek any sense of truth, as Augustine does. Life as we know it would feel lifeless and without purpose. However, as Augustine began to consider more of this relationship with temporality and truth, he chooses ignorance, in fear of challenging God’s exclusive construct of eternity (Rahman 28). Struck by the idea that his curiosity also equates with sin, Augustine reverts back to his emotions as resolve, succumbing to his unconscious will for absolution. Our emotions are extensions of our bodies, and as such, keep us with the realm of Time. Augustine saw past, present, and future, all as extensions of the mind itself. Understanding how ideas about temporality functioned in his life became too much for him. As he states, “I have leapt down into the flux of time where all is confusion to me. In the most intimate depths of my soul my thoughts are torn to fragments by tempestuous changes until that time when I flow into you, purged and rendered molten by the fire of your love” (qtd. in Rahman 28).

In Augustine’s eyes, this sense of confusion also extends to sin. As he discovers that—by God’s grace—overcoming sin also means becoming closer to God, then that also means

becoming closer to Eternity. Scholar Smita Rahman ruminates over this cycle of truth, sin, and redemption:

Augustine imbues time with both an impulse to transcendence that requires that the passions and the desires of the body be stilled for the tranquility of eternity and an element of teleology in which time becomes the progressive realization of redemption through grace, such that there is an ultimate end to man's sinful beginning in an ultimate embrace with eternity at the end of time. (30)

No matter what the quest for truth is, this experience was collaborative between two recurring sets of binaries: Augustine and God, Time and Eternity, and sin and redemption. Much like Miller believes, through his readings of Eliot and observations of *Beloved*, that the novel itself works as a performative object, eventually given meaning and creating a double translation between the author and reader (*Ethics* 65). Another binary that might help connect ideas to truth is “telling” vs. “confessing.” In an analysis of Augustine, Derrida believed that *telling* the truth was a matter of gaining information, as *confessing* the truth was the greatest push for absolution (Caputo & Scanlon 10). If God exists with the all-knowing Eternity, Derrida claims that it does not matter whether or not Augustine sought confession, as God would already know. The confession itself would be at Augustine's own drive for transcendence and truth, manipulating the intent of his emotions, and thus, consciously demonstrating them (10). The nature of Augustine's book, *Confessions*, is an example of how temporality constructs the noblest intentions of seeking truth, but still has to make us as readers susceptible to how the writer potentially differs from the context of the writing itself. Although the phrase *facere veritatem* translates as a means to make experiences true by writing about them (9), even truth has its own observations of ethics. Truth and temporality are so crucial to unearthing trauma and learning how to read it, as scholars like Pederson deduce, “[I]f only literature can access trauma, then perhaps only literature can deliver reality in its truest form” (349).

If language is how we can access the truest form of reality, then observing Augustine's use and interpretation of language is just as important when driven by his theological motivations. Reverend Robert Vallee considered how Augustine was a postmodern thinker before his time, being a resourceful person of study to postmodern thinkers like Derrida, as mentioned previously. Although the cycle of sin described earlier may pertain to Augustine's intimate experience with his quest for truth, Vallee suggests the larger extension of sin can be brought back to how guilt is a product of postmodern thinking (38). Whether through societal guilt of trauma such as the Holocaust, or even the guilt of slavery a reader may feel when exposed to stories like *Beloved* based on Sethe's experience, how guilt manifests is made plausible because of how we can understand our conventions of language. Vallee discusses Augustine's methodology of a "speak" versus "not to speak" model, prompted by this inquiry to language presented in *Confessions*: "What has anyone achieved in words when he speaks about you? Yet woe to those who are silent about you because, though loquacious with verbosity, they have nothing to say" (qtd. in Vallee 38). Whether choosing to speak or not to speak, Augustine makes a point that the real revelation is the plausibility of speaking and not speaking, as both have their own benefits. The speak or not to speak model of language expands when thinking of how emotional responses work in the process, as Vallee discusses a "sounding" versus "speaking" model (41). Although grieving over the loss of a friend, Augustine sheds tears as a response, which takes its own form of language as the "language of the heart" (41). Augustine decrees, "I became a vast question to myself" (qtd. in Vallee 41).

What then happens to language when we feel our emotions can manipulate or exist outside of constructing our truest forms of reality, as mentioned earlier? Certainly Augustine's loss of his friend is an extension of a response to trauma, but how does this now complicate

Augustine's relationship for truth and with God? Although presented with this new form of language, this "language of the heart," indicating perhaps a language where emotional responses make one closer to truth, Vallee is conscious to distinguish that "God's mercy must not be interpreted too narrowly. Truth is no less of a mercy than justice or compassion" (46). Not setting truth on a pedestal is crucial in, again, not letting emotions dictate other emotional results, like justice or compassion. Vallee expands further by deciphering that truth, for Augustine, is more about finding stability as opposed to finding its certainty (48). To define truth as an end result, perhaps through certainty or even absolution, would go against the same plausibility in the benefits of "to speak" and "not to speak" leaving us either "foolish" or "mute and blabbering" (Vallee 38) in our quest to make sense of ourselves, much like Augustine finds himself doing discovering the death of his friend. Vallee makes a profound claim, stating "we dwell in truth, the truth does not dwell in us" (48). If literature, and thus language, is the truest form of constructing our realities, then it makes sense that Augustine's *Confessions* is not written for the reader. Vallee considers that maybe *Confessions* might seem like it was written for God, but this is also untrue, because God knows Augustine better than Augustine may know himself (46). Therefore, *Confessions* must be written for Augustine himself in an effort to unearth "the secrets of his soul" (47). Nonetheless, the results end the same: a text is made and is then interpreted by its reader (in this case, Vallee), yet its interpretations are rooted in the familiarity of postmodernity, writing and emotion, and the ethical responsibility of the reader.

The question remains: what texts can we introduce to students who are able to conceptualize how emotions are performative and how to read ethically? Furthermore, now having analyzed the processes in which writers project their emotions into their work and how readers respond to them, assessing Suzanne Keen's theory of narrative empathy becomes clearer.

Although her main argument consists of the production of empathetic response in being able to relate to fictional characters, we can move beyond the characters themselves, while trying to focus on the relevant emotions instead and treating them ethically. By using a fictional text as a foundational space for evaluating how we read, as Miller suggests, I argue that we can learn how to engage ourselves in reading ethically beyond just reading fiction. Articulating the ethical moments of a fictional text, readers can determine the same ethical moments occurring in “partial fiction” texts and nonfiction texts. Scaffolding how one reads and gauging reading through these series of texts greater leads to the best sense of truth being presented to us by deconstructing language and narrative, giving equal consideration as to how writers and readers emotionally approach stories, as well as—hopefully—creating the prosocial behavior Keen seeks to establish. But what exactly is empathy?

Suzanne Keen, like Miller, is concerned with the relationship and outcomes of emotion between the author and reader, and the reader and the text. Keen first describes the difference between two relative terms: empathy and sympathy. Focusing on the “I” model of adopting one’s feelings demonstrates empathy by not only recognizing the emotional support of the emotional situation, which is how Keen describes sympathy (209). A proponent of aiding with “character identification,” Keen believes that having the first-person narrative model helps readers latch onto the emotional process of the character, without succumbing to the manipulative nature of narrative (209). Keen offers an example that adult readers of fiction are self-aware enough to know that their inclination to side with characters is purposeless in a practical sense, yet the chance at empathetic response is valid (212). However, Keen does admit that there are “complex cognitive operations” within a reader’s mind while reading texts, and that preconceived ideas of a reader’s memories and experiences add nuance in establishing how readily available a reader is

to empathetic output (213.) The sense of complexity, and even the speculation of narrative, recalls Miller's ideas about there being a crucial "ethical moment" that befalls readers. Similarly, this notion of empathetic output adds to Craps and Buelens ideas about empathy becoming an appropriate response to reading. Keen mentions a discomfort that readers often feel when understanding their involvement in being a part of the author/reader/text paradigm (222). Perhaps this is why Keen believes so strongly in the singular observation of fictitious texts as a space for readers not to feel this weight of discomfort and responsibility. Also understanding how emotions are constructed, such as citing how the fear that an author's empathetic intent behind writing could potentially manipulate readers due to the cultural context of emotions (223), Keen attempts to compartmentalize the experiences readers could potentially have while reading. Still thinking of the author as well, Keen cites how 92% of authors reported that the characters they create end up securing their own independent agency, at least within fictitious texts (221). Having a reader understand the effects reading can have on him is to begin by understanding the author's "involuntary empathy" (221). However, Keen already anticipates this possibility of what she deems "empathetic inaccuracy," meaning: "When a reader responds empathetically to a fictional character at cross-purposes with an author's intentions" (222). Keen uses this as a foundation for her framework in being able to study empathy within texts by exclusively studying fictitious texts.

Readers' perception of a text's fictionality plays a role in subsequent empathetic response, by releasing readers from the obligations of self-protection through skepticism and suspicion. Thus they may respond with greater empathy to an unreal situation and characters because of the protective fictionality, but still internalize the experience of empathy with possible later real-world responsiveness to others' needs. (220)

Although Keen extensively considers the complicated relationship that empathy has with readers and writers alike, she still remains cautious as to how to approach nonfiction texts constructively

using her model of empathetic inaccuracy. Moreover, Keen develops her own structure of understanding empathy by articulating concepts that expand the ideas behind empathetic inaccuracy, such as issues of narrative and plot, and considering what she calls, “bounded strategic empathy,” “ambassadorial strategic empathy,” and “broadcast empathy” (215).

I argue that readers are capable of overcoming the empathetic discomfort Keen describes by greater expanding how empathetic inaccuracy, or even a lack thereof, is present across texts beyond fiction. By studying texts that introduce true and untrue elements, and texts that are purely “true,” readers can prepare themselves in recognizing an author’s involuntary empathy and moments where empathetic inaccuracy could occur. By also considering Miller’s study of ethics into these texts beyond fiction, there is the possibility for these series of texts to have pedagogical merit when attempting to introduce emotion in the classroom. To understand how beneficial reading about ethics may come to be is to first understand how students already approach reading. Scholarship on the literacy of students can help build a better sense of the gap between instructors and students, much like the empathetic gap between authors and readers. Whether genre already creates an invitation to specific readers for strategic empathy (Keen 223) or studying how blending narrative strategies creates a more “true” depiction of character, and thus empathy, by representing the “uncertainty of the world” (Keen 220), reading can help answer Keen’s pressing question beyond if empathy creates prosocial behavior: If the narrative designed to produce empathy fails to do so, does the fault befall the reader or the strategy of empathy?

CHAPTER THREE

TEXTUAL APPLICATIONS: A NEW EXPERIENCE

Presenting texts to an audience, whether student to instructor or author to reader, can be an overwhelming task. Deconstructing possibilities that could occur by presenting different genres of text to readers can hopefully point to the inconsistencies reading can produce in regard to “empathetic inaccuracy” that Keen describes. Deciding what texts might be most useful in aiding students in ethically gauging empathy is important in identifying how people already read. Although concerned with reading between different mediums, such as print vs. digital, scholar Katherine Hayles identifies that a part of connecting with students and how they read is to, “[S]tart close to where they are, rather than where we imagine or hope they might be” (65). Hayles’s initiative to connect with students emphasizes the strategy of “close reading.” Identifying the themes of texts and how they link to cultural contexts benefits the reader by fostering empathetic capacity that Keen desires, but what exactly counts as close reading? Hayles admits that close reading is hard to define, as she observes a specific tactic of close reading known as “symptomatic reading” that loosely attempts to examine what a text is “saying vs. doing” (64). As students evolve as readers—in this case as Hayles describes, reading digitally—the same sentiments recur with Micciche understanding how emotions also evolve within the student, just as Micciche’s student altered her perception of reading Baldwin (*Doing Emotion* 59). Furthermore, the evolution of digital reading in classrooms, and by students outside of the classroom, reinforces Micciche’s descriptions of how students “move” differently when developing their emotions, having reading serve as a stimulant. Often with cultural contexts related to events outside of the classroom, specifically traumatic ones, literature remains as a portal for readers to recognize a sequence in regard to how they process emotion because of the

text at hand. I argue that the texts I present for sequencing this process of emotion and reading ethically is a means to “reach” students as Hayles describes, although also keeps them under critical inquiry based on scholarship relevant to these specific texts.

The Emotional Reader: *13 Reasons Why*, the Young Adult Genre, & Fiction

13 Reasons Why by Jay Asher revolves around the suicide of high school student Hannah Baker. With a series of tapes left behind, the narrator of this novel, Clay Jensen, unravels how the tapes connect to corresponding individuals of Hannah’s priority. Already, the plot of this story raises suspicion when confronted with emotional context and elements of storytelling. Identified as a fictitious text, the novel goes deeper when assessing its target audience: young adult readers. Understanding how young adult literature exists as a specific genre might also indicate its strategies of empathy. However, examining a singular genre like young adult literature begs the question: What about how other genres create conventions of narrative and storytelling?

Scholar Patricia Head studied how Robert Cormier, a children’s literature author, challenged the genre in which he writes by subverting its conventions in the first place. As a boundary where cultural elements like violence—and thus, suicide—remain undetected in children’s literature, Head begins to consider how children’s literature eventually bridges to adult literature. Her findings consider the construction of “adolescent literature”:

Adolescent literature often embraces cultural references that do not make for a safe read: violence, suicide, and sexuality, not conventional topics in the genre of children's literature. Moreover, the security of the text is often destabilized further by the narrative form, which tends to foreground the instability of the narrative through fragmented or cyclical narrative structures and multiple narrators. (Head 28)

In terms of Cormier’s work, Head continues to describe how Cormier is aware of the construction of children’s literature accommodating a child reader, although any reader that is

not a child becomes the respondent to the author because of being able to interpret the text more maturely (29). With this schema in place, Cormier attempts to reject the conventions of children's literature, such as often demonstrating non-happy endings in stories, as to not create a "phony realism" (Head 28). Head articulates that having Cormier disrupt the expectations of a specific genre of children's literature, such as having readers determine whether the author's intentions are always ones to be trusted, reinforces the "manipulative power of fiction" (29). Furthermore, the linearity and structure of stories becomes skeptical when confronted with the revelation of an author's power, having one question to himself: "What is being narrated?" vs. "Who is in control of the narration" (29)?

13 Reasons Why is a novel worth exploring these inquiries as Clay Jensen is interpreting the meaning of Hannah's tapes. In the novel, the reader is presented with Hannah's tapes as Clay plays them. He gets insight to her thoughts, usually about her peers. Already, just as Head discusses with Cormier's work, *13 Reasons Why* appears to demonstrate the distortion of narrative. Secondly, the narratives at hand, either from Hannah or Clay, are emotionally charged. Readers are thus presented with a story that confronts how to read ethically. Perhaps a way to best position a reader to understand the relationship between writer and reader in this story is by determining Miller's ethical moment of observing characters. As Miller suggests, readers should consider adopting the roles of characters within the story as a mean to already create a connection of empathy (*Ethics* 23). As the reader knows Clay to be responsible in unraveling the mystery behind why Hannah left the tapes to him, Clay still deserves suspicion regarding his own motivations. A strategy in understanding this ethical moment in assessing Clay's character is by perceiving Clay as the "reader" and Hannah as the "writer" in concern to the tapes. Furthermore, setting up this schema also creates suspicion upon Hannah's motivations. Here is,

perhaps, the most crucial measure of how empathy translates to readers if ever deciding to doubt Hannah as the author of the tapes and how empathetic inaccuracy could occur between herself and Clay. Knowing that Hannah died by suicide is to also recall how Craps and Buelens could anticipate that readers are not allowed to critically reflect the emotional implications of suicide, an act too traumatic to challenge its motivations (5). Although the target demographic of *13 Reasons Why* is young adult readers much like the characters themselves, the reaction should consider not only what to do in the wake of a traumatic event, but why the event is traumatic in the first place.

Having such a strong emotional storyline carrying the novel might undermine how Jay Asher is creating a discussion that is relevant to “What is being narrated” vs. “Who is in control of narration” mentioned prior. Although Clay does evolve emotionally the longer he explores the tapes, he does admit that he “hardly knew Hannah Baker” (Asher 10). Using the tapes to formulate a depiction of Hannah’s memories in the real-world by confronting the people the tapes are about, Clay simultaneously projects his own emotions into Hannah’s memories, thus distorting or altering the memories themselves. In this case, Hannah’s tapes are what “is being narrated” as Clay is the one “who is in control of the narration.” Having a design like this for how information—and thus, truth—is communicated, is highly subjective. Just as with Wilkomirski’s memoir *Fragments*, just because someone recounts memories from personal experience does not mean the memories should not be vulnerable to critical assessment.

Furthermore, readers of *13 Reasons Why* can understand that Clay is conscious of acknowledging that despite his acts, his actions would never truly bring Hannah back to life. “Why not just pop the tape out of the stereo and throw the entire box of them in the trash? I swallow hard. Tears sting at the corners of my eyes. Because it’s Hannah’s voice. A voice I

thought I'd never hear again. I can't throw that away. And because of the rules" (Asher 16).

Assessing this passage itself recalls a few points. The first point is Miller's idea of the "law" of literature, the second is Micciche's belief in performing emotion, and the third is how our emotions dispute objectivity. The "rules" that Clay refers to describe how Clay is meant to pass the tapes along to the subsequent listener on Hannah's roster that comes with the tapes (Asher 8). Understanding how to keep hold of her narrative, Hannah understands Miller's notion of setting up elements like character, setting, and story, for readers to interpret a message. Moreover, what is unique to Hannah's strategy for articulating her suicide through tapes—instead of writing—reinforces the effectiveness in communicating emotion audibly that Micciche has her own students do in the classroom (*Doing Emotion* 57). However, Hannah appears conscious of how to perform her emotion this way through tapes, as her motivations are revealed to be more deliberate than innocently portrayed. Hannah's drive for closure with her life is apparent with her word choice emitting how she felt her peers were treating her. Specifically, when Hannah describes a girl named Jessica on one of the tapes—and evidently other peers—she says, "Jessica, my dear, I'd really love to know if you dragged yourself to my funeral. And if you did, did you notice your scar? And what about you—the rest of you—did you notice the scars you left behind?" (Asher 68). Hannah's use of the word *scar* implies her malicious intent behind the tapes. Along with attempting to secure her trauma inflicted on her by her peers (including Clay, because he is specifically sent the tapes as well), readers discover that the reason behind Hannah creating the tapes, as well as killing herself, was at wanting to reconstruct the truth over a rumor about her spreading around school (Asher 135).

As the novel progresses, Clay is confronted by his peers—the ones that also appear on the tapes—as they also describe the memories in which Hannah describes with them, but from their

perspective. Whether at the worry that the peer giving his or her side of the story is lying because of potential consequence related to Hannah's suicide, or if Hannah's tapes are lying themselves, how truth is constructed in *13 Reasons Why* remains subjective. Furthermore, because Hannah is known to be dead throughout the duration of the novel, she truly never exists within this time. Understanding Hannah's motivations is important to Keen's theory of narrative empathy. For example, much like what motivated Augustine to *tell* vs. *confess* (Caputo and Scanlon 10), Hannah could be confessing as a form of becoming absolved from her traumatic experience of being sexually assaulted by her classmate (Asher 265). Even after her death, Hannah manages to disrupt truth and temporality in a world she no longer inhabits. For Hannah, although her version of truth becomes legitimized by speaking about it, she consciously "moves" her body in a performance of suicide. How Hannah chose to end her life is to recall Micciche's theory of how we perform our emotional states through "emotional control" (Jacobs & Micciche 52). Suicide, although unfortunate, is a performance of the body that still requires a crucial moment in not dismissing or altering the emotions that led to the outcome. For example, readers are aware of Hannah's methodical approach to killing herself, determining numerous ways in which she could end her life (Asher 254). To label Hannah's suicide as "emotional freedom" (Jacobs & Micciche 52) by articulating that Hannah's death was manipulated by her emotions in regard to the external vs. internal would go against securing her emotional agency. Thus, Hannah's narrative becomes manipulated. Evidence mentioned prior, such as Hannah choosing to leave tapes behind, the choice of using tapes as a medium for communicating truth and emotion, as well as the methodology of leaving behind a list and instructions, suggests that the most encompassing strategy in Hannah regaining her agency from the trauma of being sexually assaulted was to make herself obsolete.

Applying Keen's theory of narrative empathy in regard to *13 Reasons Why* as a fictitious text that could have readers "respond with greater empathy to an unreal situation and characters because of the protective fictionality" (Keen 220) may not best apply with this text due to its layers of character assessment and blend of narrative. Although Keen's theory of "broadcast empathy" may apply with this text, meaning it might, "call upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing common vulnerabilities and hopes through universalizing representations" (Keen 215), readers must confront their initial conceptions of suicide and how characters like Clay and Hannah perceive suicide too. As earlier stated at Clay's admission of not knowing Hannah that well before receiving the tapes (Asher 10), a reader could identify with "empathizing" for Clay. Because what Clay begins to learn throughout the course of the novel is also what the reader learns, a reader may choose to "sympathize" with Hannah by giving her emotional support for the emotional situation of suicide as Clay does (Keen 209). Beyond this singular example worth analyzing which character is meant to be the target assessment of empathy—being Clay or Hannah—other considerations begin to surface and confront the reader. Whether wondering if empathizing—instead of sympathizing—with Hannah would be to dismiss her emotional agency in securing her traumatic experience, analyzing how using tapes as a method of communicating emotion might be manipulative, or if Hannah's suicide caters to our emotions to believe her over the other characters described in the tapes, all of these considerations demand a deeper look into how texts beyond fiction also communicate these nuanced presentations of emotion from the writer and reader dynamic. "Empathetic inaccuracy" (Keen 222) occurs, maybe not between Jay Asher and the reader by understanding the work as fiction, but certainly between Clay and Hannah if observing their relationship under the same

schema. If the author does give direct intent through storytelling, under what text(s) is empathetic accuracy achievable?

Securing Empathetic Accuracy: *The Things They Carried* & Partial Fiction

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien is a text that manages to convey story with mindfulness to the reader, with parts within the text that has O'Brien debate how memories and the craft of storytelling are able to allow emotional agency. Furthermore, O'Brien acknowledging, "The war wasn't all terror and violence," (30) lays a foundation for how he begins to reshape his memories from the war in a compartmentalized space that can no longer haunt him. Even beginning to understand where to start with speaking about memory, O'Brien states: "As a writer, all you can do is pick a street and go for the ride, putting things down as they come at you. That's the real obsession. All those stories" (33). O'Brien's consciousness of how narrative and structure shape *The Things They Carried* leaves the reader to wonder how true the stories are that are being presented to him.

Kali Tal articulates that a reconstruction of trauma would first require understanding how experiences are narratives themselves and are, "[N]ot primarily after-the-fact imitations of the experiences they recount" (qtd. in Robinett 292). Scholar Jane Robinett considers how conventional narrative structure would be to condone the chaotic nature that trauma could inflict on the functionality of the victim. She claims, "Exactly because of the shattering of such fundamental conceptual systems, conventional narrative structure must be broken apart and reconfigured as well, since it becomes inadequate to contain such problematic experience" (Robinett 294). O'Brien is already aware of this construction of narrative within *The Things They Carried*, citing his obsession with writing stories first as a part of his process. In doing so, O'Brien believes the truth of the experience he obsessively writes about will eventually come to

reveal itself on its own. The truth is made most apparent with O'Brien understanding that what he writes is up for assessment by the reader. However, by directly referencing the reader, as O'Brien does when he says, "I could've done it. I could've jumped and started swimming for my life. Inside me, in my chest, I felt a terrible squeezing pressure. Even now, as I write this, I can still feel that tightness. And I want you to feel it—the wind coming off the river, the waves, the silence, the wooded frontier" (54). Demonstrating a much more direct relationship with the reader might suggest O'Brien's own process of establishing his emotional agency through the traumatic experience. Judith Herman discusses how there are three stages to recovering from trauma, which are "the establishment of safety," "remembrance and mourning," and "reconnection with ordinary life" (qtd. in Robinett 294). O'Brien shatters any chance at emotional inaccuracy that Keen describes by creating a simultaneous relationship between the reader and writer and the reader and the story. Establishing two relationships the reader can develop by reading *The Things They Carried* also separates O'Brien even further from the traumatic experiences he conveys in parts of the text where he omits himself from the story.

In "How to Tell a True War Story" in *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien professes his disdain for how war has evolved into its own form of meaning. O'Brien does not believe that there are enough war stories from those that have experienced the war to fully clarify its nature to the mainstream. O'Brien begins this chapter of the text by stating, "This is true" (64). Already, O'Brien might assume how a reader takes what he says with doubt, although also playing with the idea that readers often might believe that everything they read, whatever the genre, makes them vulnerable to emotional truths from the reading experience. "If a story seems moral, do not believe it" (O'Brien 65). O'Brien's words recall the issue with "triumph narratives" (Conway 17) and creating resolutions that could potentially undermine experiences, like O'Brien's in the war.

War itself can be categorized as an event of trauma, which is why O'Brien believes war's construction is of importance. Due to his own traumatic experiences within a traumatic space, O'Brien understands that his experiences become generalized when the truth and perceptions of war always exist outside of his experience. For example, war being interpreted by media has the same effect as communicating and telling a story. War's presentation becomes observed under a filter of violence and terror, as O'Brien is quick to dispute, challenging how "war" is just as much a construction as "peace." He goes on to say, "Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true" (77). O'Brien expands by giving a story about one of his fellow comrades and how he died, citing that truth is entirely subjective.

...he laughed and took that curious half step from shade into sunlight, his face suddenly brown and shining, and when his foot touched down, in that instant, he must've thought it was the sunlight that was killing him. It was not the sunlight, it was a rigged 105 round. But if I could ever get the story right, how the sun seemed to gather around him and pick him up and lift him high into a tree, if I could somehow recreate the fatal whiteness of that light, the quick glare, the obvious cause and effect, then you would believe the last thing Curt Lemon believed, which for him must've been the final truth. (O'Brien 80)

How we choose to communicate stories, sometimes, is what ends up becoming truth, much like in the way Hannah leaves her tapes in *13 Reasons Why*, and conveys her own version of truth. However, in instances of war, dying might be the only form of truth there is. Communicating how someone died, like Curt Lemon, is a way to become witnesses to a true experience. In O'Brien's case, fixating on truth and the difference between "what happened from what seemed to happen" (O'Brien 67) is to confide in the reader that O'Brien admits that he is a singular witness to his construction of war and does not mean to speak the truth for others in the war at the risk of misrepresentation. O'Brien's consciousness toward how he may accidentally dismiss the traumatic experiences of others is to remain conscious of Gerard Fromm's observations that in the wake of disaster, the potential to silence grief under one cumulative story is possible (175).

The reader becomes aware just how mindful O'Brien is when confronted with the idea of being held responsible for his actions in the war. He states, "I watched a man die on a trail near the village of My Khe. I did not kill him. But I was present, you see, and my presence was guilt enough" (O'Brien 171). Scholar Joshua Pederson also observes *The Things They Carried* for how war memoirs are constructed, emphasizing that O'Brien never succumbs to "traumatic amnesia" (334). Examining a passage in which O'Brien consistently implores the use of the word, "remember," Pederson claims that O'Brien does not indicate any doubt in recovering his memories (342). As stated earlier, O'Brien's emphasis toward claiming his memories could be to largely reconstruct the representation of war and/or be a side effect of writing obsessively about stories. However, O'Brien's intentions toward writing more for himself, perhaps therapeutically, or for the audience is questionable.

O'Brien's choice to unravel his traumatic memories interrogates his intent for therapeutic writing. Although O'Brien understands the weight of constructing the truth in regard to the abstraction of war stories, he becomes hesitant with considering his stories as any sense of absolute truth.

I did not look on my own work as therapy, and still don't...it occurred to me that the act of writing had led me through a swirl of memories that might otherwise have ended in paralysis or worse. By telling stories, you objectify your own experience. You separate it from yourself. You pin down certain truths. You make up others. You start sometimes with an incident that truly happened, like the night in the shit field, and you carry it forward by inventing incidents that did not in fact occur but that nonetheless help to clarify and explain. (O'Brien 152)

Although O'Brien does not see his writing as a form of therapy, even this insight might suggest evidence of Judith Herman's access of regaining oneself from a traumatic experience in regard to "reconnection with ordinary life" (Robinet 294). If O'Brien admits to separating himself from the experiences he writes about, would it not make more sense to achieve, or expect, some

distortion of the truth of those experiences? Allowing O'Brien to play with the fictionality, and temporality as well, might help fulfill the sense of Eternity that Augustine desires by not becoming bound by his memories (Rahman 27). Readers of *The Things They Carried* are not given a chance to become betrayed by O'Brien's choice of playing with fact vs. fiction, as O'Brien uses this text as a malleable representation of his thought process as he manipulates narrative structure. Thus, a reader's priority is not to become an ethical reader of emotion for *The Things They Carried*, but equally an ethical reader of determining empathetic accuracy vs. inaccuracy and how narrative structure can supersede the content and context. Toward the end of *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien discusses how stories are necessary for writers to sometimes reinvent themselves, although understanding so requires the reader not to make assumptions for the conventions of securing a writer's agency. Admitting that some stories are made-up within the text, O'Brien claims, "I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" (171).

Sometimes a reader's only job is to respect the representation of the nuanced mingling of memory and truth, either from the writer or when the writer decides to speak for others. Much like how Micciche observed others moving in and out of their Self vs. Other circles in Tsetse's class, going beyond physical and literal depictions of movement to the imaginary is still a valid experience (Jacobs & Micciche 47). Although Lisa Tsetse's class was real, the context of the class exercise was fictional by design. If we become witnesses to these physical demonstrations of emotion under a hypothetical exercise, considering the imaginary movements within someone's Self circle, perhaps, fostering even a greater capacity for empathy through imagination, is not out of the question. Although Tim O'Brien has clarifications within *The Things They Carried* for when these moments are happening, not all texts have this sense of

guidance and permission for critical inquiry, although they certainly have the same formula and concepts. By first learning how to become ethical readers of emotion by reading *13 Reasons Why*, and then becoming ethical readers of experience by reading *The Things They Carried*, how can we demonstrate these reading skills when presented with a nonfiction text?

A True Story: *The Liars' Club* & Nonfiction

The Liars' Club by Mary Karr is a memoir describing Karr's upbringing in rural Texas. The memoir navigates from a perspective that rebels against the narrative structure of *The Things They Carried*. Karr chooses to recount her entire childhood from the perspective of herself as a child as well and not the perspective of herself as an adult reflecting on her childhood. Having this choice in narrative already raises skepticism, including doubt that any crafted memoirist could recount exact memories with such detail from so long ago. Furthermore, much of Karr's childhood is dipped in traumatic scenarios, which she writes objectively and without much pause, due to the choice in keeping the narrative in the present tense. Scholar Paul John Eakin also had doubts regarding Karr's memory, especially when confronted by the relentless imagery. Eakin observes this passage in particular from *The Liars' Club*:

My sharpest memory is of a single instant surrounded by dark. I was seven, and our family doctor knelt before me where I sat on a mattress on the bare floor. He wore a yellow golf shirt unbuttoned so that sprouts of hair showed in a V shape on his chest. I had never seen him in anything but a white starched shirt and a gray tie. The change unnerved me. He was pulling at the hem of my favorite nightgown—a pattern of Texas bluebonnets bunched into nosegays tied with ribbon against a field of nappy white cotton. I had tucked my knees under it to make a tent. He could easily have yanked the thing over my head with one motion, but something made him gentle. “Show me the marks,” he said. ‘Come on, now. I won’t hurt you.’ (Karr 3)

Eakin is primarily concerned with how Karr strategically uses *I* as a measure of herself and her experiences within the memoir. By creating this reference of “I” by calling herself “Pokey” at times (a childhood nickname), Eakin argues that distinguishing this separation between two

versions of Karr is to dedicate Karr, as a writer from the present, to be able to unearth the truth from her past (Eakin 124). Eakin later discusses Dr. Damasio's theory of interrogating the self as a way of becoming fully conscious of experience and this sense of "a feeling of what happens" and "a feeling of knowing" giving signals to what Damasio describes as a "proto-self" (126). The "proto-self" is the unconscious separation that remains unrecognized by the Self in its attempt to stabilize the need for basic survival (Eakin 126). Attempting to wrangle consciousness through storytelling is to have Karr fully admit her traumatic experiences. In doing so, including building a relationship with the reader by introducing *The Liars' Club* with a traumatic situation, might be an indicator of the desire for this "proto-self" construction. Although Karr makes her own connections for why she may implement her narrative structure, Eakin makes a deduction for the reader throughout the reading experience. Eakin states, "We get the satisfaction of seeming to see ourselves see, of seeming to see our selves" (129). Therefore, the folly does not ultimately appear to befall on Karr whether or not the content in *The Liars' Club* is true. Rather, readers must become aware of the "I" narrative challenging how readers currently perceive narrative structure, and in this case, what happens when readers read autobiography. Eakin argues:

Narrative is the name of the identity game in autobiography just as it is in consciousness and in interpersonal relations, and nowhere more so than in *The Liars' Club* where Karr makes clear that her own practice of self-narration is rooted in her father's tall-tale telling that shaped her childhood and her artistic vocation. If her childhood is filled with stories, so is her adult life, in which, she tells us, the narrative work of psychoanalysis played into the writing of her autobiography. (Eakin 130)

A reader should always perceive why the context for a story exists beyond just assessing the content being presented in a text. Just as Eakin discovered the larger meaning possibly conveyed in Karr's memoir becoming rooted back in her father's own way of telling stories, it matches the impulse O'Brien had for the desire to communicate his truth based on his own experiences within reconstructing what it is like being in the war. Karr depicts the dysfunction and trauma

throughout her childhood in an objective manner—as being described in the present tense—to confront the reader with immediacy in ethically articulating the content. The sense of immediacy in this nonfiction text is important in having the reader feel the intimate nature Karr must have felt throughout the writing process of this memoir in resurfacing her own traumas. However, gaining access to Karr’s deliberate strategies in writing about her past can garner better insight beyond Eakin’s analysis of *The Liars’ Club*. Understanding Karr’s conscious methodology of writing about her emotions can verify Micciche’s theory of emotion as performance, now observing Miller’s thoughts on ethics more from the writer’s point of view.

In 2015, Mary Karr released *The Art of Memoir*, a book detailing her own writing process and thoughts on writing, specifically in regard to how she crafted writing *The Liars’ Club*. Karr’s ruminations begin as early as the preface of the text, where she discusses how attempting to resurface anything from the past will inevitably require suffering and an admission to doubts in memory (*The Art of Memoir* xxi). Like O’Brien, Karr also provides insight regarding her thoughts toward viewing writing as a therapeutic device, stating, “In terms of cathartic affect, memoir is like therapy, the difference being that in therapy, you pay *them*. The therapist is the mommy, and you’re the baby. In memoir, you’re the mommy, and the reader’s the baby” (*The Art of Memoir* xxi). Karr continues by arguing that truth remains subjective, and that her definition of conveying truth is by not allowing oneself “to pawn off fabricated events” (*The Art of Memoir* xxii). Karr is speaking from the perspective of offering writing advice and not necessarily arguing for the reason why someone should write of or from the past. The advice portrayed in *The Art of Memoir* is similar to advocating for instruction on how to write, much like an instructor would think of ways to communicate writing about setting, as Karr does of Texas. Again, with techniques like “visualization process” that Marian MacCurdy implemented

in the classroom by giving students boundaries, like strictly writing about setting, demonstrates how writing can successfully unearth the personality of the writer, while placing safeguards for any unwanted traumas (MacCurdy 179). Contextualizing “nonfiction” by reading both *The Liars’ Club* and *The Art of Memoir* by Karr can have readers understand that there are spaces where they can allow themselves to understand the different intents behind a writer’s work.

Remembering that memoir also raises suspicion, whether in instances like “empathetic inaccuracy” in *Fragments* by Wilkomirski or being cautious of accidentally instilling a “triumph narrative,” Karr quickly asserts these suspicions by claiming that she does not remember everything specifically, but acknowledges the responsibility in shaping the narrative of her family and becoming responsible for their memories as well (*The Art of Memoir* 7). In this way, *The Liars’ Club* becomes a version of truth through collective memories, but Karr’s focus is not to put the spotlight on her family, or even her considerably traumatic childhood. Just as with the passage that Eakin examines prior, he acknowledges its objective tone and simplification of affect in its delivery. The reason Karr writes with such mundanity of what happened to her is because she admits she is always conscious of what a memoirist does and does not do. Karr states, “A memoirist forging false tales to support his more comfortable notions—or to pump himself up for the audience—never learns who he is” (*The Art of Memoir* 12). Karr squanders any notion that she could misguide herself into accommodating the “triumph narrative,” but if Karr is aware of narrative structure, then how does she handle her emotions in *The Liars’ Club*? If Karr is evident in understanding the existing genre of memoir, then is there any glimmer of manipulation with how she consciously conveys emotion within her traumatic childhood? Furthermore, if Karr admits that she does not remember everything that has happened to her in

childhood, can readers become skeptical if she chooses to write like O'Brien, and play around with the past?

Again, Karr seems to recognize all of the possibilities a reader could question with her work, and with memoir in general. Karr states:

For the more haunted among us, only looking back at the past can permit it finally to become past. How does telling the truth help a reader's experience, though? Let's say you had an awful childhood—tortured and mocked and starved every day—hit hard with belts and hoses, etc. You could write a repetitive, duller-than-a-rubber-knife misery memoir. But would that be “true”? And true to how you keep it boxed up now, or to lived experience back then? (*The Art of Memoir* 13)

Karr raises a few questions to the reader on her own, questions that may reveal how we already believe we think we understand the construction of memoir, as well as our own memories. For example: why read traumatic memories of someone else in the first place? Is a memoir only detailing the sad parts—even if all are true experiences—truly capturing the entirety of the time presented—in the case of Karr—the time of childhood? Karr argues that all readers always require some form of attention that is not the responsibility of the writer but the innate desire of why we read stories: a sense of hope (*The Art of Memoir* 13). Karr points her fingers back at us, having us reassess the ethics of reading by also realizing that ethics does not equate to what is true vs. not true. Furthermore, still examining what exactly a “true” story is, Karr admits that the details within *The Liars' Club* are remembered as true (and thus, true to the reader upon admission) but could be told in a less generous manner regarding her family (*The Art of Memoir* 23). Thinking again of *13 Reasons Why*, even if everything Hannah revealed regarding her classmates turned out to be true and that they did feel responsible in Hannah committing suicide, that is only one puzzle piece of truth. Deeper truths remain locked in determining, as O'Brien says, “[W]hat happened from what seemed to happen” (O'Brien 67). Karr navigates this sense of different capacities of truth, especially in regard to her family, by explaining, “I never speak with

authority about how people feel or what their motives were. I may guess at it, but I always let the reader know that's speculative. I keep the focus on my own innards" (*The Art of Memoir* 120).

Or Karr says, "Stopping to describe something in the midst of a heated scene, when I probably didn't observe it consciously at that instant. This is perhaps the biggest lie I ever tell. I do so because I am constantly trying to re-create the carnal world as I lived it, so I keep concocting an experience for a reader" (*The Art of Memoir* 25).

Karr understands that her traumatic childhood lends itself for readers to become vulnerable to the content, no matter how prepared Karr tries to be with her writing and writing her life in a way that is objectively described. By honing in on descriptors of setting, Karr hopes that in doing so, personifying place extends to personifying the self for this "carnal" depiction of her life. Karr is aware how quick readers are—vulnerable to emotion while reading—to turn on the writer and "accept anything but deceit" (*The Art of Memoir* 43). Although Wilkomirski may have been misguided in attempting to tell a collective truth of the Holocaust, there are memoirists out there, Karr argues, that also understand reading as a form of intrigue into personal lives, but also understand the chance for profiting off a reader's curiosity and subsequent emotions in the reading process. Articulating her response to the detailed inconsistencies of trauma in James Frey's memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, likely as a strategy to appeal to readers, Karr says:

What I'm guessing: many just shrugged past it, because we've all chosen to accept that the line between fiction and nonfiction is too subtle for us to discern. That's what Frey argued on TV, vigorously. He had no reluctance to speak for all memoirists, claiming self-righteously to both Oprah and Larry King that his form of shameless 'embellishment' was customary for all memoir, since the genre's so 'new' (are you listening St. Augustine?). His self-righteous defense and total lack of apology might have tipped us off that we were dealing with a practiced dissembler. (*The Art of Memoir* 86)

Frey's failure in latching onto his more likely "carnal" descriptions of any part of his memoir was likely due to this sense of playing up to the audience that memoirists feel they have to do. Claiming that memoirists write solely for the reader is to dismiss not only the perspective of the writer's attempt at memory, but the collective memory of other representations of people within the content.

Reading nonfiction allows pathways for readers to implement Keen's theory of narrative empathy, as long as readers are wary of the intent behind a writer's nonfiction text. For texts like Frey's, readers should become suspicious if any content from the text examines the perception of others, or claiming experiences that seem to depict strong emotional value. However, as Karr mentions, accepting all emotionally charged content as true still requires critical assessment. What then, does the reader consider "true" to the fullest capacity? Is nonfiction true because of what happened, or is it truer for creating a collective ambiance to provide a more realized depiction of one's whole life? Lastly, readers should consider "empathetic accuracy/inaccuracy." Beyond reading ethically for the presented content, like suicide in *13 Reasons Why* or war in *The Things They Carried*, readers should consider various paradigms for how the writer/reader dynamic works across the author and reader, as well as the potential to also observe the dynamic between characters. To gauge empathy through these texts might give some answers to whether or not empathy produces prosocial behavior, but remaining conscious for all emotions beyond empathy to become present because of reading is to give a respectable gesture to the writer and his journey with the text. As Karr says, "Show not so much how you suffer in long passages, but how you survive" (*The Art of Memoir* 191).

CONCLUSION

How strategic Karr was in crafting her memoir in a series of three novels might imply her unconscious process toward Judith Herman's theory of the three stages of recovering from trauma (Robinet 294). *The Liars' Club* depicting Karr's childhood might be an "establishment of safety" in regard to compartmentalizing her experiences within the text, as Karr's memoirs evolve chronologically. Karr's second memoir, *Cherry*, corresponds with Herman's second stage "remembrance and mourning," as Karr shifts the narrative structure of *Cherry* less from the *I* model in *The Liars' Club* and replaces it with a reflective recount of haphazard memories of teen-hood, with periods of using the *you* instead of *I* model for storytelling. Perhaps this model is a strategy in securing emotional agency through identity construction.

As a public school teacher, your mother espouses dosing the water supply with birth control, or that's how she justifies putting you on the pill before your fifteenth birthday. Even the mention of birth control would send most mothers into a frenzy of either tent-revival hollering or else candle-lighting and novena-saying. But your mother holds loudly forth on any and all pussy-related subjects, with nothing falling too far off limits. (*Cherry* 129)

Lastly, "reconnection with ordinary life" is parallel to Karr's choice in her third memoir, *Lit: A Memoir*, to attempt to sever her habits that appear to mirror her parents' habits from childhood. Karr details her journey to self-discovery by recounting her experiences with faith and religion. Although the reader's reaction to the content Karr delivers in her memoirs is valid, it is important to note Karr's conscious choice in writing about her life in specific stages this way, and that she continuously allows herself to grow with her life, and admit that her life still has chances for redemption past her personal traumas.

Recalling Woolf's moments of "shock" (Hagen 270), perhaps Karr is seeking to wrangle these moments of "being vs. non-being" too by compartmentalizing her life across three books. Furthermore, having this compare and contrast model across three texts gives Karr the liberty to

consider how she writes differently about her life, whether in the moment as each memoir seems to depict vastly different times in her life, or her admission earlier in Chapter Three that if she could, she would write about her family less generously in *The Liars' Club* (*The Art of Memoir* 23). Composition scholars like Rachel Spears might worry that Karr does not conquer “wounded healer pedagogy” (68) if attempting to convey all of her childhood traumas within *The Liars' Club* as a way to create this sense of “completeness” for the trauma to become fully repressed. Although this possibility seems unlikely, given how expansive Karr attempts to chronicle her life through three books, and how her objective sense of writing about setting is a way to neutralize her traumas and to consciously divert from any aspect of memoir like the “triumph narrative.” Furthermore, how Karr describes writing about her life based on *The Art of Memoir* may indicate that Karr does not even see her life as moments of “being vs. nonbeing” like Woolf did. Karr placing so much responsibility on the reader to make deductions about her life also releases the weight of the trauma only impacting herself. Karr writes, “I can also honestly say that publishing the story freed us from our old shame somehow...but something about having all the bad news out in open air freed us even more” (*The Art of Memoir* 119). For Karr, there does not have to be a compartmentalization of “being vs. nonbeing” if taking its own form of what would likely be the product that is the story. Moreover, Karr discusses a strategy that she finds allows her the most access in securing her emotional agency in relation to memory: the consciousness of re-readability. Karr suggests that, in the case of memoir, memoir’s fullest version of “truth” is to also consider its “beauty.” “Beauty” is for the reader and how the reader invests in the story’s elements like characters and setting (*The Art of Memoir* xxii). By shapeshifting what Karr would consider traumatic details of her past, she understands how she is able to mold her experiences for the reader to be allowed to enjoy the reading experience. Having a reader consciously want to

reread a text is to imply a positive reaction, and that positivity can negate the negativity of the context. Establishing this revelation—understanding that writers can permit themselves to revise, rethink, and consistently reevaluate their lives—opens up an important discussion regarding reading ethically: Is it right to make ethical deductions about a text when reading it for the first time?

In the introduction, I discussed how Benjamin Hagen found himself confronted by Woolf's work and how her work consistently had him reshape his identity in response to his environment. Hagen cites that because of the act of rereading, too, he could better understand himself as a reader and a scholar. The act of rereading helps deconstruct our initial reactions to texts because of our preconceived identities approaching a text for the first time. Just as Geddes discusses researching trauma, is there an ethical issue when observing trauma from an academic context vs. a personal point of view (2)? Therefore, does my selection of sources and organization in discussing emotion, experience, and truth have its own demand to be read ethically when considering my academic and personal motivations? Although these questions are abstract in nature, we now know there are strategies in composition studies through instruction that help quell these concerns. Examining how Micciche's "deep embodiment pedagogy" (*Doing Emotion* 60) might apply in a reading of Karr might also have students demonstrate a childlike performance of Pokey. Such a performance might include a southern drawl to one's voice to help convey the societal issues of *The Liars' Club* inferring what it is like to live in a state of poverty atop mental duress. Finally, as Keen defends how reading fiction benefits readers by acknowledging that readers cannot be given "realistic aid" (Keen 220), is reading ethically and being given realistic aid achievable through nonfiction? Although unclear and dismissive to assume that every reader of nonfiction is seeking the realistic aid of being able to identify with

the intimate content of a nonfiction text, readers might be able to adopt the true experience of reading itself, which manifests itself as “realistic aid.” Perhaps the only way to be certain of how this sense of “aid” is working constructively is by taking Karr’s advice to seek to reread and constantly reinterpret texts. Just as with our own lives, our emotions are constantly changing, evolving, and becoming redefined. Treating books—and thus, stories—the same way is perhaps the greatest example of reading ethically, whether between the reader and text, reader and writer, or in some cases student and instructor.

Again, regarding emotion, in the introduction I discussed how much emotion remains a critical area of study due to how emotion is culturally constructed. Regarding other points of discussion, including truth, memory, and experience, now more than ever, there is a demand for the reader and writer relationship to receive extensive inquiry due to the large spectatorship revolving around current societal concepts like the #Me Too and Time’s Up movements. As both movements confront relevant ideas mentioned in previous chapters, like “What is being narrated?” vs. “Who is in control of the narration?” (Head 29) this inquiry also recalls securing the “empathetic accuracy” of the victims of sexual assault—and thus—of trauma. With media unmasking the instigators of sexual assault as well as allowing victims a space to share their personal stories of trauma, our duty—as readers—is to communicate these stories based on how we read them and how the writer is presenting them, all while relying on the powerful global discussion on emotion.

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APPENDIX A: OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY APPROVAL



Office of Research Integrity

December 6, 2017

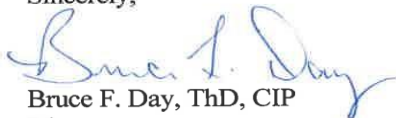
Christian Simms
2215 Lenora Street
Milton, WV 25541

Dear Mr. Simms:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled "*The Truth About Literature: An Examination of Emotion and Ethics Across Genre*". After assessing the abstract, it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction, it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,



Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director

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